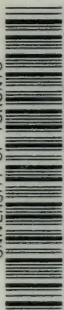


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IDEA OF TRAGEDY  
IN ANCIENT AND  
MODERN DRAMA

THREE LECTURES DELIVERED  
AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION  
FEBRUARY, 1900  
BY  
W. L. COURTNEY

WITH A PREFATORY NOTE  
BY A. W. PINERO

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

MY DEAR COURTNEY,

Your publishers have flatteringly invited me to write an "Introduction" to your lectures on *The Idea of Tragedy*, but, even were I competent to avail myself of so great a privilege, I should consider it in the highest degree presumptuous, as it would be superfluous, in me to "introduce" an acknowledged scholar and authoritative critic like yourself. When the scholar and thinker speaks of immortal poets, and of their development of an idea which has proved a source of noble and lofty inspiration to man through innumerable ages, the playwright of to-day, seeking illumination, must surely be among the humblest of his listeners. What has such an one to do with the part of Master of Ceremonies? And what need have you of such a functionary? However, I feel that personally I owe you a large debt of gratitude, and in payment I can only offer you this my note of hand.

For the busy man, in this bustling London life of ours, the incentives to dream himself into other centuries, and so keep alive in him the poetic influences of the past, are unhappily rare to seek ; but when the occasion arises, the enjoyment is past expressing. This is what I owe to you, my dear Courtney. Yours was the wizard's wand that guided me from century to century, from land to land. I have heard many lectures on many subjects ; I have been instructed sometimes, and wearied often. But you appealed to me less as a lecturer than as a singularly delightful talker, who, master of his subject in all its lights and shades, stimulates his listeners' thoughts, awakens their imaginations, and starts their memories continually on unconscious journeys from which they return with refreshed impressions.

It was not long after I had stepped out of the sunny greyness of the London streets, exchanging the noisy bustle of the traffic for the almost solemn quiet of the theatre of the Royal Institution, before I yielded, with the rest of your audience, to the persuasive charm of your voice. At first, when you told us how Solon, in matter-of-fact terms and without understanding, had

questioned the dramatic art of Thespis—much as some of our latter-day wise men and legislators are apt to do—the sense of the present was strong upon me. But when you proceeded to trace the gradual growth of tragedy from its crude beginnings, the magic of your words, revealing the true inwardness of classic days, called up visions of Greek villages and earliest Dionysiac revels, exquisite with colour and the elemental joy of life ; and anon, as you led us to ancient Athens, and the great names of Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides rolled intimately yet worshipfully from your tongue, other visions arose of huge majestic theatres open to the heavens, with vast Athenian crowds applauding the immortals ; and then, as in an under-dream, one seemed to hear Aspasia's rapturous words in Landor's masterpiece :—" What a theatre ! What an elevation ! What a prospect of city and port, of land and water, of porticoes and temples, of men and heroes, of demigods and gods ! " Then, with that curious double working of the mind—which one may liken to the effect of the telephone, when one's own conversation is fantastically accompanied by the distant messages of

other voices borne on crossing wires—while still intently listening to your discourse, as you spoke of the “Agamemnon” and of the “Œdipus,” I seemed to be visiting again the beautiful classic theatres of Fiesole and of Orange, dreaming under the blue deeps of southern skies, and recalling the antique dead to life. Also I seemed to be sitting again at the Théâtre Français, while Mounet Sully led me, through the enchantment of his art, into the very heart of Greek tragedy, giving life to the tremendous creation of Sophocles as surely no Greek actor in a mask, with the conventions of the Hellenic stage, could ever have done.

But you changed the scene and the epoch. You conducted me to spreading England in its first throes of imperialism, and to the “spacious days of great Elizabeth”—and what could that mean between us two but—Shakespeare? I say between us two, for the rest of your auditors had become for me as nought. You were talking, in that charming manner of yours, just to me alone, and, in place of the crowded lecture room, I saw the Mermaid Tavern — saw its benches filled by a convivial throng, made up, for the most part, of men whose names

are for ever sweet in English ears ; saw, at another moment, the little Globe Theatre on Bankside, where Shakespeare was giving to the players the eternal laws of their art, picking out, with the eyes of my imagination, that "delightful Proteus" Dick Burbage—surely the most highly privileged of all actors, for did he not embody Hamlet, Othello, Shylock, Lear, Macbeth, as they came new-born from the poet's pen? And as I listened to you while you traced the idea of tragedy expressed through these deathless creations, there came to me pleasant recollections of my boyhood's days, when, from a point of vantage in the gallery, I saw my first Hamlet, my first Othello, my first Macbeth, receiving impressions which, even when my later judgment may have rebelled against them, have been treasured in secret as tenderly as the dolls of poor Mrs. Solness. Then, from behind the curtain of unwilled memory, there came nearer and more vividly, at your mention of Othello, the majestic figure and sonorous voice of Salvini, the Italian ; at your mention of Hamlet and Macbeth, the impressive and picturesque presence, the



imaginative and intellectual domination of our great English tragedian, Henry Irving; at your mention of Mark Antony, the classic dignity of Ludwig Barnay; at your mention of Romeo, the romantic figure and beautiful diction of Forbes Robertson; at your mention of King John, the subtle presentment of Beerbohm Tree. And, as you spoke of Shakespeare — the worldling, the man of affairs, the family man—happy wanderings in his own idyllic Warwickshire came back to me with that strange undercurrent of reminiscence, and I could almost see again the quiet waters of Avon stealing gently and reverently past the graveyard of the old church of Stratford.

Once again you changed the scene and the epoch, as you carried the idea of tragedy from the full-blooded universality of Shakespeare's theatre, big with the poetry of all humanity and the constant optimism of the ages, to the dreamy, childlike pathos of Maeterlinck's spiritual marionettes and the small despairing message from the great voice of Henrik Ibsen. And, as you analysed this message of the famous Norwegian dramatist, and probed its parochial pessimism, I was

carried away in memory to the Grand Hotel at Christiania, where punctually at certain hours I had seen a short, stout, grey-whiskered old gentleman, with keen eyes and a hard-set mouth, scrupulously dressed in a black frock coat, come to sit on a particular chair in a particular window, his mug of beer upon the window-sill, and watch the world—his world of native Norwegian townsmen and touring foreigners. Scandinavia's greatest poet this, and one of the most potent dramatic influences of our day. Yet, along the cross wires of thought, came Æschylean echoes from Marathon and Salamis, came also Shakesperean echoes from Arden, and the Mermaid, and Elizabeth's Court—and I felt grateful that the tragic idea had developed in a larger atmosphere than the smoking-room of a Norwegian hotel. For in that larger atmosphere the tragic note, as you say, has never sounded the despair of human virtue even when it has sounded the despair of human happiness.

And now, my dear Courtney, you tell us you perceive signs encouraging you to hope that the tragic idea may yet find fruitful stimulus in the great tumult of imperial emotions at present

stirring the world-spirit of our peoples. With all my heart I trust it may prove so ; and that we poor modern playwrights will not be found wanting at least in the endeavour to respond to lofty and heroic inspiration.

Believe me, my dear Courtney,

With sincere regard,

Your obliged friend,

ARTHUR W. PINERO.

*May 5th, 1900.*



# I

“Through the influence of music the Apolline element is engrafted on the Dionysiac wildness.”—NIETZSCHE, *The Birth of Tragedy*.

SOLON, who was one of the traditional wise men of Greece — it is Plutarch who tells us the story<sup>1</sup>—once went to see Thespis act. And after the play was done, he asked him if he were not ashamed of himself to tell so many lies before such a number of people. When Thespis replied that it was no harm to say or to do so in play, Solon vehemently struck his staff against the ground. “Ay,” said he, “if we honour and commend such play as this, we shall find it some day in our business.” Here is one of the earliest recorded instances of the judgment of the intellect on things of the imagination. Observe the two points which are found fault with in art. First, judged by a severe standard of experience, it is false ; next, it has a deleterious influence on the practical conduct of life. Solon, no doubt, pre-

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch's *Life of Solon* (Dryden's translation ed., Clough).

served his reputation for traditional wisdom by occasional lapses into folly, as is the habit of other wise men whose *obiter dicta* are apt to miss the higher aspect of things. But I begin with the story as indicative of a contrast you will find running through the history of Greek art, and also, to a large extent, of modern art—the wide divergence between the most cultured efforts of intelligent criticism, and the spontaneous outpouring of the artistic imagination. When it came to be the task of Plato and Aristotle to give a philosophical account of the work which men like Pheidias and Praxiteles, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides had done before them, they failed nearly as completely as Solon did, and for a similar reason. They applied the analytic processes of logic to a phenomenon, an artistic birth, an æsthetic illumination, which has little or nothing to do with mental processes at all.

In any study of the origins of the tragic idea, we must begin with the discovery that drama in general, and tragic drama in particular, has its birth not in the intellectual nature of man, but in the popular mind. Tragedy is born of the people, and belongs to

the people, and is based on some rudimentary instincts of popular fancy and popular mysticism. It has its justification, therefore, in some essential qualities of human nature itself, and owes little or nothing to the dialectical processes of pure reasoning. No clearer or more pertinent lesson than this can be derived from the study of how Greek drama arose. To receive the marvellous in the spirit of a child of the people, is the true tragic inspiration.

Never had a great and distinguished art such ordinary and commonplace beginnings as Greek Tragedy. A crowd of rustics in villages hold a rude festival in honour of the god Dionysus with verses appropriate to the occasion, celebrating the deity's characteristic actions and qualities in a chorus, rude, enthusiastic, riotous, with touches of early pessimism and many notes of extravagant joy. Dionysus is not only the god of wine, nor was his festival only celebrated in autumn. To him belongs the birth and burgeoning of the earth in spring. He is the god who makes the young world live again, who makes men enjoy the produce of the grape, and many other things besides—a wealth

and amplitude of existence, an appreciation of the secret lying at the heart of the universe, an opening out of new faculties and powers, a larger life, when the snows and the winter are over. From the village the Dionysiac festival is transplanted to the towns, and there, possibly, owing to influences from the Peloponnesus, it assumes a new character. Gradually the incidents in the god's career, his sufferings and his triumphs, are exchanged for, or amplified by, tales and stories of legendary Greece and the history of her antique heroes. The leader of the chorus is distinguished from the body of choristers as one who has something to say on his own account. He becomes an individual personage, an answerer, hypocrites, an actor. As time goes on, this single actor is reinforced by another, and in turn by a third. Such is the genesis of the Greek drama, kept close to its ancient form by its chorus, by its musical setting; and gradually distinguished from its ancient form by two things above all;—first, the introduction of distinct personalities, who answer the chorus; second, by the extension of subjects dealt with, the adoption of the ancient heroic legends

of Greece as a storehouse of dramatic material.

How large a part the popular mind played in this gradual evolution, it is now easy to surmise. When from the standpoint of later ages we look back upon the Greek drama, our inclination is to appreciate with higher zest the characters, the management of the plot, the development of the intrigue. It is the chorus, however, which is the characteristic thing in Greek dramas, the chorus as the outward and visible sign of the popular feeling and the popular intelligence, from which all Greek drama and Greek tragedy were born. Because it was found in the earliest examples, the chorus survived for some time in later history, a sort of pallid and ineffectual ghost and a dramatic tradition. It was obviously a pure survival, whether it appeared in the French classical dramas or in Shakespeare, without any vital connection with the play or any veritable *raison d'être*. Significantly enough you will find that in comedy the chorus, which Aristophanes still uses, disappears altogether, although it survives much longer in tragedy. The reason is clear. Both comedy and tragedy have, it is true, the same root;

but the first can be patronised by intelligence and the logical intellect—criticism can always make merry over follies—while tragedy belongs to the people, and will therefore bear longest the impression of that popular imagination whose artistic form is the chorus.

How are we to understand the meaning of this chorus, the most significant thing in Greek tragedy? You will find several learned interpretations, especially in German commentators. Schlegel speaks of the chorus as the attitude of the ideal spectator, the ordinary and intelligent judgments which a man who knew the whole story would pass on the action of the characters. Or it may be that instead of the ideal spectator, we should talk of the average spectator, and you would then get an estimate of the functions of the chorus which might be true of Sophocles, and if we add the lyrical element, true also of Euripides, but certainly not true of *Æschylus*. To *Æschylus* the chorus represents much more—the general background of historic conditions in the midst of which the action is taking place, the recital of the old stories of a doomed

house, the antecedents and the heritage of the principal personages. Sometimes, again, the chorus stands as the embodiment of the ordinary moral laws as against the tragic figures on the stage who are so often transgressing them and coming to condign ruin in consequence. In a sense, Schiller's idea of the chorus is true—that they wall in the imaginary world and shut out the real world. Moderns keep the audience on the one side of the footlights and the actors on the other; the Greeks were inclined to include the audience in a certain fashion within the circle of the stage, so that both elements—spectators and actors—might contribute to the artistic result. The people went to the theatre as though to a religious or state festival, and just as they were eager to give their views in the popular assembly on the political situation, so in the theatre they were keen to add in sympathetic excitement their quota of participation to what they saw enacted before their eyes.

All this the chorus represented, but above all it bore the traces of its popular birth in the great Dionysiac festival, when all those who were present partook of solemn rites and were



moved simultaneously by common impulses. Observe especially that there was here an union of speaking, dancing and singing, and that one of the characteristic marks of difference between ancient and modern drama is the large space allotted in the ancient to music. Music, as it is the latest expression of indefinite art-feeling, so also is it the earliest. It gives utterance to that undertone of melancholy which appertains to the popular rustic mind, the first notes of that pessimism which afterwards enthrals some of the deepest thinkers. There is a strain of mysticism, of sorrow, of passionate regret, in all the early outpourings of the popular mind, combined too with an extravagant joy, as a reaction against the gloom. Most of the drinking songs of the world are set in a minor key ; all the Volkslieder, all the popular songs of a peasantry, have a plaintive, sober, melancholy air. We do not know very much about the mysteries of ancient Greece, the Eleusinian mysteries, the Dionysiac mysteries, the Orphic mysteries ; but we do know that they too exhibited a certain undercurrent of woe. The people who lived nearest to Nature could at times put on a frantic joy, as



the Bacchanals did in honour of their god who gave them the produce of the grape; but they were also conscious, in every bone and fibre of their being, of how hard Nature could be, of the misery of bad seasons, of the intolerable weight of a long and rigid winter, of the difficulty of making both ends meet, of keeping a roof over their heads and a fire on their hearth. Nature could smile in spring and summer, but it made men weep in autumn and winter. Above all, below the radiant face of the natural world, was the dark and mysterious gloom of the under world, whither men, after much vain labour and sorrow, descended and were heard of no more. You will find precisely the same spirit running through Mr. William Morris' *The Earthly Paradise*; indeed, something of the kind has become the sign of modern romantic melancholy. In Maeterlinck's early dramas, you have got this strain of pessimism, combined also with an effort to reproduce by words the vague suggestions of music. The very repetitions of a phrase, which light-minded critics laugh at in Maeterlinck as the reminiscences of an Ollendorffian grammar, are in reality musical phrases and not literary at all

—iterations and repercussions of a characteristic phrase such as you would find in a fugue.<sup>1</sup> The *leit-motiv* in the Wagnerian opera is of course the same thing. We in this modern age should find no difficulty in comprehending the Dionysiac mood in early Greece, for we have apt parallels amongst ourselves in other forms of art. There are romantic melancholy and a half fugitive joy in Burne-Jones; there are romantic melancholy and yearning in Rossetti; there are romantic melancholy and despair in Maeterlinck; there are romantic melancholy and madness in Wagner.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, these Dionysiac elements, as we may call them, these vague moods of the popular imagination—rhythmical, musical, declamatory—cannot discover some outward embodiment and expression of themselves without the aid of a creative artist. What Nietzsche in his interesting essay on the birth of tragedy describes as the Apolline element must be superadded to the Dionysiac mood.

<sup>1</sup> See Introduction by J. W. Mackail to Maeterlinck's *Aglavaine and Selysette*.

<sup>2</sup> See a chapter entitled *Modern Melancholy* in *Modern Mysticism and other Essays*, by Francis Grierson.

“The blank misgivings of a creature moving about in words unrealized” are by themselves inarticulate, dumb; they must get a voice through the mouth of an artist, through Æschylus and Sophocles. Nor are they only dependent on the existence and the genius of a great creative artist; they must also find the right period, a period of great popular expansion, a birth of national ardour, a fine glory of patriotism. As it was in the Elizabethan age, so was it in the Athenian age. Greece throwing off the menacing invasion of the Persians was like England throwing off the ominous threats of a Spanish Armada. In each case the people and a nation awoke to a consciousness of itself and its own powers. Then, and only then, was a new art born. The times were ripe, and the man was there—Shakespeare to voice the patriotism of England, Æschylus to give expression to the victory of enlightenment over barbarism. But you will see also how the very idea of tragedy got its distinctive and its most permanent character. From the vague feelings of men’s short life, and the imminent doom of death, gradually arose the notion of a fate, an imperial and arbitrary destiny, an awful shadow of superincumbent fortune, in

the midst of which men had to spend their brief time of tempestuous life. And the other element, too, of tragedy, the element of individual strength and will, the man struggling against his fate, and now and again with power to overcome it, finds its apt parallel in the ceaseless combat of Athens, the centre of light and intelligence — “la ville lumière” — against the dark forces of barbarism, those endless Persian hosts with which it was her mission to struggle. If I am at all right in what I have tried to convey to you hitherto, you will find that the idea of tragedy involves at least three ingredients or elements. In the first place, it is born of popular pessimism and melancholy. In the next place, it finds artistic voice when the people become conscious of themselves and of an exalted national task. In the third place, if we analyse it, tragedy is always the clash of two powers — necessity without, freedom within; outside, a great, rigid, arbitrary law of fate; inside, the undefeated individual will, which can win its spiritual triumph even when all its material surroundings and environment have crumbled into hopeless ruin.

We are now in a position to under-

stand the conditions under which dramatic art blossomed in Athens. We will put aside Thespis and his cart, the earliest known form of a travelling theatrical company. We will dispense with the supposed derivation of tragedy from the prize given to the successful competitor, Tragos, a goat ; for all these things, fabulous or not fabulous, are at all events enveloped in the darkness of an early age. When Æschylus steps forth out of the mists we get on firm ground, and realize that we have to deal with one of those great inventive artists who leave their mark on history. A singular man, this Æschylus : a patriot and a soldier first of all, a man who fought at Marathon and was equally active at Salamis ; a hero who, by the happy accident of fortune, was contemporaneous with that hand-to-hand struggle between the West and the East, between a nascent civilization and an inveterate barbarism, which we call the Persian wars. Nor is it only as a soldier that Æschylus claims our interest. He is one of those deeply religious men who, just at the period when crude theological notions are being revised, and possibly called in question, sets himself to the task of putting new life into theology by

wider and more humane ideas. There is nothing, observe, at this period in the 5th century B.C., when Athens was busy showing herself the home of all art and all culture, of the notion that the artist is a special, separate creature working at art for art's sake. No; the outburst, the awakening, the most splendid period which has left the most imperishable monuments in the world was originally based, first and foremost, on a great wave of patriotism and national ardour—a conflict with Persia; and based in a secondary but no less important degree on an ardent religious interest. It may or may not be true that, as history goes on, and the different interests of men specialise themselves more and more, the artistic impulse must keep itself distinct from either religion or morals, that it must never preach a sermon or teach an ethical lesson. Nevertheless, its roots are nearly everywhere found in a religious and ethical soil, and its chief manifestations, whether in Greece or in the Italy of the early Renaissance, or in Elizabethan England, are dependent on the heightening of the national feeling, a general unloosing and enlivening of popular energies.

Imagine, then, these Dionysiac fes-



tivals, no longer in the rural districts, but transferred to a capital like Athens. There are three or four poets competing for a prize, each of them bringing forward three plays, followed by a satyric drama, which was a piece of buffoonery, a kind of farce for the satisfaction of the vulgar, like the farce which so often forms the after-piece in a theatrical performance in the provinces. A huge semi-circle of seats, perhaps first made of wood, afterwards of stone, looked down upon a central portion, called the orchestra, and allotted to the chorus, who, as they sang, made evolutions round an altar dedicated to Dionysus. Beyond the orchestra a simple and rude platform of wood, from which the actors spoke, afterwards furnished with some kind of scenery, representing the outside of a palace or what not, with passages right and left, conventionally denoting the way into the country and the way into the town. It is a huge structure, and thousands of people can witness the performance. Therefore, the actors are mounted on buskins, and wear masks, with some cunning arrangements to make their voices reach to the farthest circle of the audience. Overhead, the sun—Apollo himself—

shines, and there are glimpses beyond of the olive trees and the hills, and the intensely blue Ægean Sea. What kind of drama is possible under conditions like these? It clearly must be something formal, statuesque, large and simple in its design, more careful of the broad effects than of the minute points of characterization, always with something of the statuary's art about it, like that of Pheidias on the frieze of the Parthenon. Those masks, one would think, would be a real obstacle to anything like individuality; yet they were artistically devised, apparently fitted close to the face, and were frequently changed. How frequently you can easily imagine, when you remember that Æschylus had only two actors to start with, and that it was Sophocles who invented a third. The actor-manager, under such circumstances, would not have much chance of displaying his individual peculiarities. But the Greeks did not care much for the individual actor as such; to them he was the mere vehicle for expressing the words of the poet and the acts of the hero. And there was no lime light.

Limitations are the artist's opportunity. They may impose on the



inferior craftsman a burden too difficult to be borne ; for the higher artist they are not leaden weights, but wings. When Æschylus took in hand the business of play-writing, he managed to observe faithfully the conventions, and yet put into them a new life. One of his earliest pieces was a great national drama—the victory of Greece over the Persians—the sort of thing we should nowadays expect to find at Drury Lane. It was after the battle of Salamis, when the wooden walls of Athens or, in other words, her ships, had destroyed the Persian hosts, under the very eyes of Xerxes himself. What would you expect under such circumstances — a great theatrical display of the majesty of Athens, a long and boastful tirade to show that there never were such men as Athenian warriors and seamen? Nothing of the kind! Æschylus lays the scene at the Persian Court. We are asked to sympathise with the woes of Persian ladies, above all of the Persian Queen, Atossa, into whose soul the iron has already entered. Once, it is true, the poet allows himself, through the mouthpiece of a messenger, to paint the glory of the Greek navy, a veritable epic of Salamis, in a magnificent piece of oratorical verse.

But throughout we are invited to look at things from a Persian standpoint, to see the despair of Xerxes, to observe the ghost of Darius rising from his tomb to rebuke the degeneracy of his descendants. A subtle artistic device, if you will, to enhance, as it were, negatively, the prowess of Athens, but still full of sympathy for the Persian wounded and dead. Clearly this was not a play by an ordinary man, but a true and honest piece of work by a Marathonian warrior who, full of pride in his own country, had learnt the respect, born only in the battlefield, of the enemy. The Greeks, at all events, celebrated their festival by being sorry for the Persians. It was an age before newspapers!

This, however, except so far as clemency to the vanquished is a national duty, hardly touches the deeper notes of *Æschylean* drama. We have yet to see in what sense *Æschylus* as a playwright was also the founder of Greek tragedy. Let me refer back once more to the essence of tragedy, as I have ventured to express it. Put briefly, it is always a conflict between a great law or power, universal or world-wide in its scope, and the free will of the indi-

vidual. Necessity without, liberty within — that is the great theme which, however disguised, runs through every tragedy which has been written in the world. Now for *Æschylus*, living at a comparatively early stage of the historic period of Athens, there were notions deeply imbedded in the popular mind as to the action of divine powers and the necessity of wise conduct for the individual, which to his intelligence appeared crude and imperfect. Nothing, for instance, was more common in Greek ordinary thought, as indeed it was equally common in Jewish ordinary thought, than the idea that the sovereign power or powers in the world were exceedingly envious of human prosperity. The Jewish tribal god proclaimed himself as a jealous god. Herodotus, who represents the average thoughtful mind of Greece, a little childish and credulous, tells story after story—for instance, that of Polycrates of Samos—to prove that the gods had very carefully to be propitiated by any lucky, prosperous, or successful man. In combination with this notion of divine jealousy, we find the idea also of an inexorable law of destiny to which the

Olympian gods were themselves subject, a great hard iron despotism of fate, without ears to listen to human prayers, without eyes to see the range of human misery. It was an irreverent theory for any one who believed that the world was governed by intelligence, regulated by justice, and tempered with mercy; moreover, for purposes of tragedy, it was an undramatic theory, giving no room for the play of individual action. On both these grounds, because Æschylus was not only a deeply religious man but also an artist, the inventor of Greek tragedy modifies the theory. Is there such a dreary despotism of fate? Nay, but we must not call fate the implacable thing, *Ἀδράσθεια*, but *Νέμεσις*, the apportioner, the power which apportions and allots to every man according to his deserts. Is God really jealous? Nay, but except in a metaphor we should not speak of the jealousy of Heaven, but of the wanton insolence of man, the *ὑβρις* of prosperity and success, which, leading him on from one thoughtless, defiant, or swaggering act to another, breeds, as Æschylus will tell you, and inevitably begets its own punishment. Thus, it is not so much Zeus who is jealous

of human success ; it is the successful man who becomes insolent, and exceeds the rules of that wise moderation alike of conduct and of thought, which the moralists of Greece were always enjoining.

Let us see for a moment how *Æschylus* applies these ideas to his dramas. I take, as a matter of course, the celebrated trilogy of the *Oresteia*, the three plays, *Agamemnon*, *Choephoræ*, and *Eumenides*, which, because every member of the trilogy has been preserved, give us the true idea of what was in the dramatist's mind. *Agamemnon*, the conqueror of Troy, belongs to a doomed house ; so much for the old idea of an irrevocable destiny. He comes back from the city which he has vanquished to find that in his absence *Clytæmnestra* has sinned with her paramour *Ægisthus*, and he is killed like an ox at the shambles by the very woman who is welcoming him so glibly with her false words. His son *Orestes*, together with his daughter *Electra*, conspire against their mother, *Clytæmnestra*, and kill her in turn. Then *Orestes* is plagued by the furies, the *Erinnyes* of his dead mother, and only at the last, before the *Areopagus*

of Athens, and owing to the direct intervention of Heaven, is the matricide pardoned, the Erinnyes, the dark instruments of vengeance, being converted into the Eumenides, the kindly instruments of blessing. It seems to be a dreary catalogue of crimes, as though the curse of the family was being inevitably passed on from father to son. But the fact that the eventual issue is happiness, the dark furies being turned into beneficent fairies, makes one look more closely at the dramatic characterisation. Is Agamemnon so innocent a victim? No, he has been guilty of much insolent cruelty towards the conquered city of Troy; he has brought back as his especial spoils Cassandra, whom his wife knows to be her rival; instead of thanking Heaven for his safe return, he accepts almost divine honours, audaciously walking on purple carpets, where a more modest entry would have been in far better taste. Moreover, he had sacrificed his and Clytæmnestra's child, Iphigeneia, in order that he might get favourable winds to help the Greek expedition. He had, at all events, consented to her death, an act which her mother was not likely to forget. His murder, then, is not a matter in



which we should arraign the justice of Heaven ; it is, in a sense, brought about by his own actions.

Take Clytæmnestra again, a hard, imperious woman, a Lady Macbeth without the "compunctious visitings" of conscience, a traitor to her husband, as Hamlet's mother Gertrude was with Claudius. If she dies by the hand of her son who is avenging his father's death, is she not rightly slain? Yet she too had much to complain of. She had suffered all the agony of Iphigenia's sacrifice ; she knew the position in which Cassandra was being brought back to her hearth, and at the last, Æschylus, the cunning dramatist, makes her appeal to our pity by showing her almost broken down with revulsion against the eternal bloodletting when she sees the dead body of Ægisthus. Or take the case of Orestes in the last place. Was he right, or was he not right in the murder of Clytæmnestra? He was wrong, because all matricides are wrong ; he was right, because every son is bound to do justice to his father's memory. In a sense, too, he was but the helpless victim of a great family destiny, a heritage of crime, descending from the fatal quarrel between Atreus and

Thyestes. Here was a fine case for casuistry, such as the Jesuits in later ages might have delighted in. But observe with what punctilious jealousy Æschylus holds the scales even. He shall be punished, driven from land to land by the Furies, which, in other words, are the stings of conscience; but he shall be saved at last, because the motive of his actions was a good one, and because Zeus wills not the death of a sinner. Will you say that there is no justice in divine decrees? Will you say that man is helpless in the hands of fate? Will you say that the laws of heredity are adamantine in their force and stringency? Æschylus will not have it so. The divine ordinance is worked out through human frailty. No one is punished except for acts of cruelty, which, in themselves, invite their proper retribution. Somewhere in the dreary chain of crime and chastisement, it is possible for the individual to hold up his hands and say he acted for the best. Orestes is pardoned at the last. Above all, there arises a great moral law, an ordinance of the highest value out of the struggles and sufferings, the disasters, the fruitless efforts, the prayers, and the ruin of



human lives. The law of retribution is stern enough, but there is another law that only by suffering can a man learn all the finer graces of sympathy and loving-kindness, flowering out of a horrible experience of evil. *Pathema, mathema*, sorrow is knowledge. Assuredly, he envisaged his dramatic task most seriously, this first inventor of tragedies, this Hellenic investigator of the meaning of human existence. Like the great Hebrew dramatist who wrote the Book of Job, he tried to reconcile the ways of God to men.

I pass by with only a most inadequate and cursory reference others of the seven dramas which form all that we have left of the work of Æschylus—the drama of hospitality, as in “The Suppliants”; the drama of patriotism, as in “The Persians”; the drama of individual duty towards the State, as in “The Seven against Thebes”; above all, the great drama of “Prometheus Bound,” which has served so often as a tragic fable of the doom of reformers and innovators. In the last of these, Æschylus rises to a still higher standpoint in his reform of current mythology. Prometheus was a great benefactor to mankind. He communicated to men that supreme

invention of fire, which raised them from bestial levels to the possibilities of social habits, and the blessings of home. For this, Prometheus is punished by an angry Zeus, and he is chained to a rock while a vulture gnaws at his entrails. Is it wrong then to snatch the secrets of the Olympian gods and disclose them to mortals? *Æschylus* will tell you that there was an older dispensation where there was much Olympian cruelty and despotism. But after Saturn and Chronos comes Zeus, whose providence tends to order and harmony rather than chaos, and who ultimately forgives and releases Prometheus, because the Titan will join with him in promoting a newer and a better reign. So everywhere *Æschylus* is on the side of religion reformed by morality, and believing as he does in the gods of polytheism, yet strikes ever and anon the note of monotheism. Listen to him, for instance, in the celebrated chorus of the *Agamemnon* :—

“ Zeus, by what name soe’er  
He glories being addressed,  
Even by that holiest name  
I name the Highest and Best.  
On Him I cast my troublous care,  
My only refuge from despair,

Weighing all else, in Him alone I find  
Relief from this vain burden of the mind." <sup>1</sup>

It is time to turn from Æschylus to the next inheritor of the tragic mantle, Sophocles. If Æschylus was in many respects a prophet, his younger contemporary, Sophocles, was above all an artist. The religious thinker, the philosopher, the Marathonian warrior who saw visions and dreamed dreams, had put certain problems before the world. The problems remained, but their handling, and, as it were, their envisagement, might be different. A sort of Faust drama, as Goethe conceived it, with a prologue in heaven and an epilogue in hell, and a running accompaniment of angels and demons, might be succeeded by essentially the same problem of human temptation and frailty, without the supernal or infernal background. Something of this species of difference is to be observed when we leave the Æschylean drama and approach the Sophoclean. It is the kind of contrast which exists between the work of Pheidias and the softer, more humane work of Praxiteles. The tragic note becomes,

<sup>1</sup> The translation is by Professor Lewis Campbell. See *Æschylus; The Seven Plays in English Verse*, p. 145.

in a sense, more acute, because the sorrows and struggles of the individual human being are represented as they occur on the ordinary worldly stage with all the pity and terror which they inspire, unrelieved by any looking before or after in a transcendental region. Here is, for instance, Ajax, an extremely human being, very proud of his thews and muscles, a stout fighter, who deserved more than any one else to inherit the arms of the dead Achilles. Nevertheless, it is decided that Ulysses should have them, and the poor simple-minded and gallant hero feels intensely mortified and hurt. He thought, poor fool, that his own estimate of himself was that which others entertained. He believed, in the teeth of all common experience, that his place could not be readily filled by any other man. As the poet represents it, Ajax has not only to suffer the misery of being slighted and passed by, but is visited by a divine plague of madness, so that, thinking he is dealing with his enemies, he falls upon and destroys only innocent herds of cattle. Vanity, the poet would suggest, is after all a form of madness, a mistaken estimate of men and things. Ajax wakes from the

stupor of his insanity to find himself seated in his tent in the midst of the slaughtered herds, a man disgraced in his own eyes as well as in the eyes of all his Hellenic comrades. The chorus of Salaminian sailors remains true to him, as also does his slave-wife, but how can the broken threads of so ruined an existence be again picked up? A goddess interferes to soften the relations between himself and Ulysses, but for the hero himself, who looks with clear-eyed sanity at the catastrophe of all his hopes and ambitions, there is only one issue, a proud, solitary, dauntless death inflicted by his own hand far from the haunts of men.

Sophocles was above all an artist, and probably because he based his idea of tragedy mainly upon artistic considerations, he makes the drama wholly connected with the human sphere. Æschylus was not a dramatist at all in a modern sense: Sophocles was a dramatist, even in a modern sense. He was called the Attic Bee, because of the sweetness of that Hymettian honey which his verses could distil. But he was also a craftsman, knowing how to involve his plot, and make every complication work

towards the *dénouement*. Observe just a few points in passing. In the story of *Œdipus* and elsewhere, he has some idea of intrigue; he is aware of the effectiveness of a situation in which, while the spectators know everything, the actors themselves know nothing. This is practically what some critics, including Bishop Thirlwall, have called the irony of Sophocles. Irony in the ordinary signification it certainly is not; it is not even irony in the sense of Socrates, where a profession of ignorance is used as a convenient cover for a vast amount of knowledge. The irony of Sophocles is nothing more nor less than the quite modern device of not keeping secrets from your audience. You should not utterly surprise and confound your spectators by some sudden revelation in the last act. They are apt to resent this. What they really like is to be a good deal wiser than the actors in the fable, because they then fully appreciate the bearing of the various incidents. The Greek dramatists never thought it injured their story that it should be known from the very beginning. Euripides goes so far as to have a prologue in which he succinctly tells you the whole of his

plot before the action begins. Dealing with a well-known store of heroic legends, the Greek dramatist was like Shakespeare dealing with English history. Every one knew how the play was going to end, because every one knew the story with which it was concerned.

The especial characteristic of Sophocles, however, was that he deliberately put in lines which bore a different signification to the man in the theatre from that which they bore to the speaker on the stage. A precise parallel will be found in Shakespeare's "Othello" where Emilia says to Desdemona, "Is he not jealous?" and Desdemona replies with scorn, "Who? He! I think the sun where he was born drew all such humours from him." The very stupidity of Desdemona in this ignorance of her husband's chief characteristic adds immense poignancy to the feeling of the spectator. It is in this way that Sophocles designs his tremendous tragedy, "Ædipus the King." From the very outset—in the first 150 lines—the dramatist lets you know the awful issues involved. Here is a king, amiable, benevolent, full of an intense desire that his people should be pros-



perous, who sends to the oracle to inquire for what cause his people are plagued; and all the time he is himself the cause. He is a parricide, though he knows it not. He is guilty of incest, though he knows it not. The audience know it quite well, but all through the play the King is shown them innocently asking the most deadly questions, and receiving the answers which every man in the auditorium understands, and only the poor victim of destiny cannot comprehend. Then at last, through the agency of Teiresias, the soothsayer, and some simple shepherds, the terrible revelation is made to him, and the accursed of men and gods, with eyes torn from their sockets, mad with grief, and conscious that he is the curse of his city, rushes on the stage, a thing to shudder at and abhor. You will remember, doubtless, how M. Mounet-Sully acted the scene in 1881.

If this were indeed all, if Sophocles had contented himself with painting so unrelieved a tragedy as this, we might well call him the worst of cynics and pessimists, because he made not the guilty but the innocent suffer. But the second play in the trilogy, "*Œdipus at Colonus*," is a

singularly sweet and quiet picture of an old man's growing peace and contentment. The blind *Œdipus*, the wreck of all that once he was, secures at last the "passionless bride, divine Tranquillity," because Heaven, while inexorably ordaining that crimes even when they are unconscious shall meet with their appropriate penalty, yet has some regard for the motive as well as the effect of the acts, and appreciates the difference between conscious and unconscious guilt. There is a chorus in the play of "*Œdipus at Colonus*," which, where everything is attuned to the notes of domesticity and peace, is one of the most beautiful poems of this Attic Bee. And it is a pretty story that when the sons of Sophocles haled the old man before the courts on the ground that he had lost his intelligence, and could not therefore make arrangements for the division of his property, the dramatist did nothing but recite this famous chorus, and so convinced the judges that whoever was mad, it was at least not he.

Sophocles, I say, was an artist, a dramatic craftsman, and there are many smaller points by which this could be illustrated. Aristotle declares that he invented stage scenery, though

possibly he only means that he added to stage effect. We know that he invented the third actor, a device of which Æschylus afterwards availed himself, and it is said too that he initiated the plan of writing certain parts for certain actors, though I do not know whether that ought to be called an improvement. But, at all events, he saw far more clearly than his predecessor the dramatic value of his heroines. Clytæmnestra is a magnificent part in Æschylus, but she possessed no subtle, only grandiose, traits. Cassandra is a part with some of the theatrical value of a prophetess of doom—let us say, a glorified version of the Rat-wife in Ibsen's "Little Eyolf." Io in "Prometheus Bound" is merely the plaintive maiden. But think of Sophocles' women. There is Dejanira, wife to Hercules; there is Tecmessa, sympathetic slave-spouse of Ajax; there is Jocasta in Œdipus; above all, there is the contrasted pair of noble women, Electra and Antigone—the first, a girl grown old, weary with waiting for her brother Orestes, who is to execute vengeance for the death of Agamemnon; the second, Antigone, in the wealth of her blossoming girlhood, who, though she is beloved by

Hæmon, yet goes to prison and death under the orders of the tyrant Creon because she insists on giving her fallen brother, rebel as he is, decent and honourable burial. Nothing was Sophocles fonder of than the contrast between the stronger and the weaker girl, between Antigone and Ismene, between Electra and Chrysothemis; nor were there many relationships which the poet cared more to magnify than that between brothers and sisters.

When we come to Euripides, we shall find that all this study of woman's character for the stage is carried much further, and becomes indeed one of the marks of the later dramatist's art. And here it would be my proper duty to proceed at once to Euripides, and to attempt to estimate the points of contrast between him and his predecessors. I will not adopt this obvious course, partly because not sufficient time remains for its execution, but also for a much more important reason. I do not desire to occupy myself with the mere historical order of events in one department of Greek literature—you will find that described in any ordinary handbook—but I am speaking rather

of the spiritual affiliation of ideas to one another, and of the relations between kindred systems of thought in different epochs of the world's life. Now, so far as I can see, there is a very general analogy between the historical conditions of Athens when Euripides was the popular dramatist and the historical conditions of our modern age. There is the same break-up of old ideas owing to the solvents applied to them by philosophy and science. There is the same substitution of a purely æsthetic aim in works of art for the older religious and ethical aims. In many senses, although he keeps to the ancient framework, Euripides is quite a modern, and to me, at all events, it is more interesting to study him in comparison and contrast with the modern era. Perhaps I should not be altogether wrong if I called Euripides an ancient Ibsen, or Ibsen a modern Euripides.

There is, however, a point of some importance, the last with which I shall trespass upon your patience. It is odd to reflect how all this wonderful outburst of dramatic art in Athens affected the minds of the more thoughtful members of the commonwealth, the great philosophic thinkers of Greece, Plato

and Aristotle. Both, let it be remembered, wrote when the first fine fervour of artistic creation was gradually dying away into degenerate forms. Yet this does not altogether account for the chilling contrast between the artists, the poets, the sculptors, the painters—and dignified philosophic critics. What will Plato tell you? He will assert that all art is imitation, and that poets and artists must be banished from an ideal state, not only because they are merely copiers of what Nature does ineffably better, but because they deliberately play upon human emotion, and so weaken the true civic nobility and sincerity. What will Aristotle tell you? He is much more tolerant of art than Plato. He wishes to regulate its exercise and not forbid it; but he too thinks that art is mainly imitation, and when he gives his definition of tragedy, he not only puzzles every commentator, but disappoints us by the narrowness of his view. You remember the celebrated definition: “Tragedy is an imitation of some action that is important, entire, and of a proper magnitude, in the way not of narrative but of action, effecting, through pity and terror, the purgation of such passions, or tendencies.” That purgation, *κάθαρσις*, has

been a terrible stumbling-block for critics. Because art never is and never was mere imitation, but also idealisation, some have desired to read into the word *κάθαρσις* the signification of "ennoblement," or "ideal illustration," or "typical exhibition," or something of the sort. But in truth *κάθαρσις* is a word adapted by Aristotle from medical analogies. It only means purging as medicine purges, and thus denotes the fundamental feeling of the philosopher that emotions as such were bad, and ought to be purified. Dr. Johnson hit this off well enough in answer to a question of Boswell. He says quite simply, that it means the expulsion of impurities.<sup>1</sup> What Lessing says on this point in his *Dramaturgie* or Goethe in his study of Aristotle's *Poetics*, I have no time to refer to.<sup>2</sup> The real point is, I take it, that because pity and fear are disturbing emotions in the human frame, because they are full of impurities, because they lower the standard of the strong human being, and lessen the rigour of moral laws, Aristotle thought it was just as well that spectators should go to a

<sup>1</sup> Boswell's *Life*, ann. 1776.

<sup>2</sup> Lessing's *Dramaturgie*, No. 48. Goethe's *Nachlese zu Aristoteles Poetik*, 1826.



theatre, and see what fools the tragic characters made of themselves by indulging in such emotions. As you watch the mimic action of the stage, your compassion for the woes of hero or heroine is mixed with a personal fear lest you too should suffer by some similar transgression against ethical codes, and you leave the theatre, so Aristotle thought, chastened and humble, realising that feelings are dangerous guides, and emotional displays the mark of a feeble nature. It is odd to reflect how small an explanation this philosophic criticism gives one of the immense, vivid and abounding energy of the art life, how little it describes the work of the artist, how little it corresponds with the grand place which art has always held in human existence. But there has been a long-standing quarrel between philosophy and poetry, as Socrates says in the Republic. Once more we are brought round to the essential difference between two kinds of human being, the practical man who does, and the artist who dreams, the philosopher who thinks, and the dramatist who imagines. Solon going to see Thespis act remains the type of this contrast. "Are you not ashamed to tell so many lies before such a num-

ber of people ? If we honour and commend such play as this, we shall find it some day in our business."

But as it is Plutarch who gives us the original story, let Plutarch also give the correction. Repeating the words of Gorgias, he tells us that drama is a form of deception "in which he who deceives is more to be justified than he who does not deceive, and the man who is deceived is wiser than the man who is not deceived."<sup>1</sup> If you are going to believe in the world of imagination and romance, the stronger your belief is, the more thorough shall be your consistency and your justification.

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch's *De audiendis poetis*, p. 26.

## II

"None but yourself shall you meet on the highway of Fate. If Judas go forth to-night, it is towards Judas his steps will tend."—*MAETERLINCK'S Wisdom and Destiny*, Section 10.

"DID Cicero speak?" asks Cassius in the play of *Julius Cæsar*, and Casca answers contemptuously, "Ay, he spoke Greek." In the last lecture, we too have been speaking Greek, trying to understand how the Greeks represented to themselves some of the insistent problems of humanity. In order that the further remark of Casca may not be true—"but for mine own part it was Greek to me"—let us attempt to recapitulate very briefly some of the points. We found that while the philosophical critics, one with undisguised aversion, another with tolerant but somewhat condescending acceptance, spoke of art in general, and dramatic art in particular, as imitation, the early dramatic artists of Greece understood quite differently the tasks which they had set themselves to perform. They

knew quite well that they were so little imitating such acts and personages as they availed themselves of, that they might rather be described as freely reconstructing the material before them in such shapes and with such definite designs as suited their imagination. Their great storehouse of materials was the old heroic legends. The annals of the house of Atreus or the Labdacidæ, the Pelopidæ, and the rest, were to them as the chronicles of Holinshed and North's Plutarch, the stories of Bandello and Cynthio's Hecatommithi, Saxo - Grammaticus, and Belleforest were to Shakespeare. Shakespeare made a somewhat different use of his materials, as we shall have occasion to see later, but for the ancient as for the modern artist the problem was the same—so to carve out and fashion a story from the great quarry of legendary tales, that it should be a complete work in itself with a definite plot, definite characterisation, and definite incidents leading up to the catastrophe.

More especially, however, in reference to our immediate subject, the Greek dramatists had seized the leading idea of tragedy, though in details they had evolved it differently. They saw

that in its essence tragedy always meant a conflict of some kind, depending on two antagonistic factors. Necessity without, freedom within, the conscious exercise of personality, brought into direct and immediate struggle with the stern environment of destiny—features like these we saw were woof and warp of the Greek tragic drama. On the whole, however, it would be true to say that the notion of an external fate remains the essence of the Greek creed. Agamemnon dies because of the curse on the house of Atreus; Orestes suffers because he is pursued by the Furies of his murdered mother; Œdipus is condemned because on him too had descended the iron hand of an external necessity. Both Æschylus and Sophocles, it is true, put into their exposition of these gloomy themes the notion of human responsibility, and therefore, in a certain measure, human freedom. Without this indestructible feature of a man's will, there could be for art no tragedy at all. The absolute quiescence of fatalism kills all dramatic significance of character. We have in the present lecture to see how these old-world problems of fate and free-will, of fore-knowledge and responsibility, presented themselves to the

great mind of the English dramatist who marked the next decisive advance in the conception of tragedy.

It will be remembered that one other point which, as I take it, is of immense consequence in the proper understanding of an art period, and therefore of the nature of art—is that *Æschylus* and *Sophocles*, and to a smaller degree *Euripides*, were connected with a great uprising of national vitality and vigour. *Æschylus* was a Marathonian warrior. *Sophocles* was once elected as a general. Both were keenly responsive to a great contemporary feeling, and both would equally have repudiated the idea that the artist is a solitary man, belonging to no race or country, leading his own life, pursuing his own ideals in cloistral and selfish isolation. The same general phenomenon is observable in the case of the Elizabethan dramatists. They, too, belong to a period of great awakening; they are part and parcel of the dawning consciousness of England's imperial destiny. Take away this background, and they cannot be understood, least of all the greatest of the group, *Shakespeare* himself. It would be as true of him, as it is indubitably true of *Æschylus* and *So-*

phocles, that he represented a young and ardent national feeling, throwing off all foreign dominion whether of Spain or of Rome, and rightly struggling to be not only free, but to exercise a world-wide sway. In the case of Shakespeare, however, we have a peculiar intellectual environment, which for analytic purposes we can distinguish from the national environment. I do not intend to talk about the Renaissance temper as such, or even attack the large subject of the different conditions of modern and of ancient life. My business is rather to seize the characteristic points, to bring out the salient traits. There are two to which I must draw attention, which I can perhaps phrase in the following sentences. Shakespeare adapted the Gothic spirit to dramatic literature; while like many of his contemporaries, he accepted, clung to, believed in, the facts of human life, instead of inventing theories about them. Or to put the two more shortly. Shakespeare was equally inspired by the Gothic spirit and the spirit of positive realism.

The first need not detain us long. The obvious contrast between a Shakesperian and an ancient drama is that the modern involves a great many



more characters, includes a great many more grotesque incongruities. The difference is just that between a Greek temple and a Gothic cathedral. The ordered lines, the somewhat cold, symmetrical balance, the air of solidity, of definite shape, of frigid squares and parallelograms belong to the one; to the other the flowing line, the flying buttress, the sense of inextricable confusion—nevertheless presided over by a governing unity—the love of grotesque gargoyles, the extraordinary mixture of the noble and the ordinary. We have only to remember how a classically educated mind, for instance Voltaire, described Shakespeare as a God-intoxicated barbarian, and we can understand how Pheidias, say, with his Parthenon, would regard the architects of Cologne Cathedral.

The other phrase requires a little more scrutiny, because such words as positivism and realism have gained so many confusing connotations in modern controversy that we are forced to proceed warily. The easiest way, perhaps, will be to guide ourselves by a series of negations. It has pleased many critics to ask whether Shakespeare was a Roman Catholic or a Protestant, whether he believed in this or that doctrine of

theology. To questions of this sort the answer must obviously be No. You cannot describe our great dramatic artist in any such precise and definable terms. Still less, if you ask, Was Shakespeare an atheist? can you do anything but deny the appellation. Nor is it at all truer to talk about Shakespeare's political creed. He has been called a sound old conservative, because in "Coriolanus," for instance, he sympathises with the man against the people. He has been called a revolutionary, because in "Julius Cæsar," our last word of pity and compassion is for Brutus. And we may go a great deal further than this. Was Shakespeare a philosopher? No, not in the strict sense. Did he think that art should always have a purpose, always be didactic? No, assuredly not in the strict sense. The fact is, of course, that all these questions arise from a kind of amiable weakness, through which we desire to include an artist under some convenient categories. The bigger the man, the less can he be docketed and labelled.

In Shakespeare's own case, however, there is a wider reason for this. Belonging to the spirit of the renaissance,

and its revolt against mediævalism, he showed a characteristic intolerance of all cut-and-dried formulæ of any and every kind. I would no more speak disrespectfully of Mediævalism than I would of the equator. Mediævalism was a great spirit of learning, of spiritual and mental discipline; but the essence of it was, nevertheless, the constant tendency to substitute theory for fact. If you asked any questions about the operations of Nature, you were told that Aristotle said so and so; if you confronted any problem of man's relation to the Infinite, you were assured that various œcumenical councils of the Church had laid down very precise and definite dogmas on the subject. The revolting spirit of the new learning could not away with this stoppage of all free enquiry by authority. Young and ardent, and resolved to live his life as he pleased, and to find his own answers to his questions in such experience as he could obtain, a man of the renaissance kicked down all the elaborate edifice of theory and formula, of ancient metaphysics and crystallised theology. He would breathe his own air of enfranchisement and liberty. He would go down the primrose path to the

everlasting bonfire, or win his way through the strait gate and by the narrow path—in his own fashion. Authority, theory, dogma—these he could not tolerate. Francis Bacon, an inadequate scientist, but also the father of modern science, threw off this incubus of authority in experimental research. He taught men everywhere to interrogate Nature and to let her answer her own questions. And according to their own fashion, and from their different points of view, every contemporary of Shakespeare, not only Bacon, but Cranmer and Hooker, Edmund Spenser, and Sir Walter Raleigh did the same. The one great thing was to get hold of the facts of life, to found yourself upon them as they exist and are discovered by the natural exercise of your powers, not to live in a dreamland, not to foreclose all enquiry by a dogmatic pronouncement, not to think it necessary to answer either Yes or No, but to answer both Yes and No if such were the meaning that the facts bore.

It was in this sense that Shakespeare might be called a positivist or a realist. He deals with real figures, with living men and women. He accepts positive facts. With all his

inclination to dream dreams and see visions, nowhere will you find so clear a condemnation of the visionary and the dreamer as Shakespeare gives you. Indeed, in his own life, he proved how steadily he kept before himself the material facts of his existence by making his money and buying land, and settling down as a substantial burgess in his own native city. At the very time that he was thinking about his "Othello" and "King Lear," he was bringing an action against Philip Rogers in the Court of Stratford, for the recovery of £1 15s. 10d.<sup>1</sup> I can imagine that with his positive practical intelligence—in itself perhaps a reaction against idealistic tendencies—he thought as much of the malt and meal for which payment was due to him as he did of the spiritual agonies of Macbeth. He was not an artist wholly immersed and lost in his art. He sat loose to his art—which is sanity; he was not wholly captured by it like Shelley—which way lies madness.

It is necessary to lay stress on this practical side of Shakespeare's genius, because it explains not only what I venture to call his realism, his resolute

<sup>1</sup> Professor Dowden's *Shakespeare, His Mind and Art*, p. 33.

acceptance of the fact, but it gives us an insight into the way in which he interpreted to himself the problems of destiny and character—in a word, the whole subject matter of tragedy. He had certain examples before him, which no doubt whetted his practical instincts. He saw what had happened or was happening to some of his associates and fellow playwrights. The stormy, meteoric career of Marlowe, the death-bed repentance of Greene, the reckless Bohemianism of Kyd and Peele, these were object lessons which did not fail to impress his mind. Rarely have the two sides of man's nature been so vigorously expressed, yet so completely fused, as they were in Shakespeare. The artist life, the life of the gipsy under tents, the free witticisms at the Mermaid tavern, where Ben Jonson, like a weighty Spanish galleon, was circumvented and overwhelmed by the nimble privateer-like spirit and audacity of Shakespeare—all this made one aspect of his life; the other was to be found in the careful man who gradually amassed money, who saw the value of worldly success, who intended to redeem his family at Stratford from the straits to which the extravagances of his father had

reduced it. How will so duplex a temperament as this regard the facts of life, especially those deeper facts which make for a man's spiritual as well as temporal prosperity? He sees that the world itself interposes a natural barrier to a man's ambitions and hopes. In other words, the environment of the individual is in a sense a destiny, in the teeth of which he has to make his individuality felt. And so, when he determines to write a series of dramas on the English Kings, he will give you various portraits of how to make or mar one's fortunes. Or if you are not looking so much at the conditions of mundane prosperity, if your spirit is touched to finer issues with regard to the fate of sensitive or thoughtful or passionate or head-strong or self-willed men, trying to work out their mental salvation in that arena in which the forces of good and evil are for ever struggling, Shakespeare will give you another series of portraits in which destiny is no longer either social or political environment, but wears the face or form of a man's own character, inherited or acquired.

The artist's faithfulness to fact here stands him in good stead, just as his sympathy with the idealist and the



practical man makes him at once the sanest and the deepest of thinkers. Nowadays, if we have to confront the problems of good and evil, of man's free will and natural necessity, we have inevitably to go through this theory or that, this philosophy of brightness, or that philosophy of gloom, approaching our subject through an avenue, as it were, of theories and formulæ. It is our instinct to do this because the hungry generations tread us down. So much has been stated and devised and formulated and systematised since Shakespeare wrote. But Shakespeare was singularly unhampered by theories. He could look at the data before him with a fresh and open intelligence. He will not give you dogmatic conclusions, but he will state the facts. Sometimes this absence of a conclusion irritates us, just as the Athenians were irritated by the tentative methods of Socrates. We are tempted to ask, Did Shakespeare think that the antithesis between good and evil would always endure, or did he think that the people would always be a vacillating herd, turned this way and that, now by the personal character of Brutus, now by the flashy eloquence of Antony?

Shakespeare, I say, was not minded to give us positive replies, either to our psychological or our political questions. He was an artist first and foremost, not a preacher, and he lived in an age before democracy had shown its powers of cohesion and self-control.<sup>1</sup>

So rarely does Shakespeare reveal his dramatic methods that it is interesting to discover, both in his earlier dramas and in his histories, one artistic device in which he evidently believed. He thought that a certain symmetrical balancing of characters and of subjects was the way to produce the greatest effect on his audience. At first his genius, naturally enough, has to run in trappings. Take for instance two early dramas, "Love's Labour Lost" and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona." In the first you will find the King and his three fellow-students set over against the Princess and her three ladies. In the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," Sylvia and Julia are distinguished as the bright and intellectual heroine and the ardent and tender heroine. Proteus is fickle, Valentine is faithful; Launce

<sup>1</sup> "Others abide our question—Thou art free!  
We ask and ask. Thou smilest and art still."  
M. ARNOLD'S *Sonnet on Shakespeare*.

is a humorist, Speed is a wit. Look at the opening of "Romeo and Juliet." First two Capulet men-servants are introduced, then two Montague men-servants. Then a representative of the Montagues in Benvolio, then a representative of the Capulets in Tybalt. Then the respective heads of the two houses, Capulet and Lady Capulet, Montague and Lady Montague; finally the Prince. Still more odd is it to find how the characters in "Hamlet" balance, as it were, the characters in "Romeo and Juliet."<sup>1</sup> Romeo is full of passion, and a man of the South; Hamlet is steeped in meditation, and is a man of the North. Romeo's friend Mercutio is brilliant, witty, effervescent; Hamlet's friend, Horatio, is grave, self-controlled, serious. And, of course, the two scenes are equally contrasted. On the one hand, the moonlit night in the garden, with Juliet leaning from the balcony and Romeo whispering below, and the nightingale's song throbbing all the while from the pomegranate tree; and on the other hand, the eager, nipping air of the platform of Elsinore, with the frowning battlements, and the heavy-headed revel heard in the

<sup>1</sup> The remark is made by Prof. Dowden and many others.

distance, and the ghost of the old king shimmering in the far different glamour of an icy moon.

But now let us turn to the histories, where again you will find the same symmetrical arrangement. There are six main heroes in Shakespeare's histories, and they figure in three sets of contrasted and balanced characters. King John is the weak criminal, Richard III. is the strong criminal. Henry VI. is the weak good man, Henry V. is the strong good man. Richard II. is a man who thought that the problems of kingcraft could be solved by a certain sentimental and artistic prettiness; Henry IV., winning no small measure of success, thought they could be solved by a certain skilful and crafty manipulation—as though the art of ruling were in the one case mere fanciful play, and in the other deliberate machination. Observe once more that in these historical plays, Shakespeare thought that everything turned on the nature and temperament of the individual king—indeed that was very largely the case in early Tudor times—while, from his own point of view, he was making studies for himself of the way in which material prosperity is to be gained. You cannot play with life, or call for a

looking-glass, as Richard II. did, to see what face you are wearing in adversity. It is not much good, from the point of view of material success, to be amiable, good, and inspired with the most admirable sentiments, if you are also weak, as was Henry VI; still less can you dash yourself against the moral order of the universe by cold, cruel, masterful wickedness, as Richard III. attempted. No, the ideally successful man is Henry V., with his bright geniality, his instincts for managing things, his native strength and good humour. No one could paint more tragically than Shakespeare the woes of lovers. But Henry V. tells his French bride, Margaret, without any hesitation, that, although it is true that he will die, it would be false for him to say that he will die for the sake of her beautiful eyes. "For these fellows of infinite tongue, that can rhyme themselves into ladies' favours, they do always reason themselves out again."

The treatment of Henry V., by the way, is a remarkable example of Shakespeare's resolute adherence to the normal laws of life and character. The young prince was a wild madcap, entering with seeming recklessness into

all the fun and frolic of Eastcheap life. How was it to be explained that he afterwards became such an admirable King, so full of wise justice and sanity? The chroniclers, whom Shakespeare must have consulted, gave up the problem. The change must be due to a miracle, a special act of supernatural grace. But the student of natural life knew nothing about miracles and celestial conversions. To him, as against such authorities as Caxton and Fab-  
yan, the difference was mainly one between youth and manhood, between early frivolity and a later sense of responsibility. Shakespeare was making much the same alteration in himself, effecting the conversion of a deer-stealer, a libertine, a haunter of the Mermaid, a writer of "Venus and Adonis" and some extremely highly-coloured sonnets, into a careful man of business and a worthy and respected citizen of Stratford. All the time in Henry Vth's character there was a substratum of common sense, of self-control; he could be in the world at Eastcheap, and yet not of that particular world; he could be a Bohemian and an adventurer, and yet "cultivate his own garden," live his own real life elsewhere. And so he

turns on his boon companion, Falstaff, with that terribly stern and just reproof:—

“ I know thee not, old man : fall to thy prayers  
How ill white hairs become a fool and a  
jester ! ”

We are on the verge of the tragedies proper, but before leaving the subject of the histories, which only in a secondary degree interest us, let us make one remark on the most singular of the historic characters—that of Richard III. It is, in a sense, an un-Shakespearean character, because it is so little analysed, so wanting in contrasted elements, so terribly simple, direct, incomplex. Richard III. is hardly a man at all ; he is a dæmonic agency—the lust of power raised to an almost incomprehensible degree. As a tragic hero, he is not so much by Shakespeare’s hand as by Marlowe’s, perhaps the one indubitable Marlowe character in the range of Shakespeare’s work, as Prof. Dowden has remarked. For how did Christopher Marlowe go to work in putting his great personages on the stage ? He took one prominent quality, exaggerated its intensity beyond all human bounds, and the man appeared as a monstrous exhibition of a prevailing characteristic,



which had eaten up all the other traits of humanity. Tamburlaine the Great was a monstrous exhibition of barbaric savagery and power. Barabas, the Jew of Malta, was a monstrous exhibition of avarice. Dr. Faustus was a monstrous exhibition of the lust of knowledge. The fate of these men does not touch us, because we do not feel quite sure that they are human at all. Not as a rule did Shakespeare work thus: his characters have an infinity of elements harmoniously combined. Yet Richard III. is also a monster, a monstrous exhibition of a colossally evil will, of what Aristotle called *δεινότης*, intellectual cleverness, engineered by an enormous power of volition, and become fiendish. Perhaps Shakespeare, when he began to work at tragedy, a sphere of art in which Christopher Marlowe was a recognised king, was bound at first to try a tragic hero in the Marlowe vein, before he found his truer business on widely different lines.

In approaching Shakespeare's treatment of tragedy, there are one or two things which it is necessary to remember. The first, which is perhaps the most important of all, is that the Shakesperian drama is a drama of in-

dividuality, and necessarily possesses limitations which such a characteristic involves. I mean that the Elizabethan dramatist, either because of the particular period in which he lived, or because of a particular tendency of thought which links him in this respect with Carlyle, made the *dénouement* of his dramas turn on the virtues or vices, defects or excellences of an individual. He cares to some extent for the political environment, as can be seen in his histories, and also for the social environment, as in "Romeo and Juliet" and many other plays. Nevertheless, the whole of that modern thought which speaks of the growth of a social organism, and which makes the fate of individuals subordinate to it, is, for the most part, wholly unrepresented in Shakespeare. Since Auguste Comte, the Positivist philosopher, added to the list of sciences the most modern of all—sociology; since Herbert Spencer wrote his *Social Statics*, and has since completed his study in the imposing volumes of his *Sociology*; we have learnt to look upon the gradual evolution of a social order, as some great wave which carries along the individual with it. With this conception is also connected

our fuller appreciation of the popular forces in history, and of the progress and the meaning of democracy. I need not say how small a place in Shakespeare's theory of existence the people held. He is perpetually laughing at them, not only in "Julius Cæsar," but constantly through his histories, and above all in "Coriolanus." Like Carlyle, and to some extent Froude, he believed in history as made by individuals, as a series of annals of great heroes. No modern dramatist can afford to put the social organism, with its laws, and its slow, methodical, and irresistible progress, on one side so completely as Shakespeare does, for he would be untrue to the prevalent conception of his day. And, possibly, we may see when we come to the Norwegian dramatist, Ibsen, that this makes a characteristic difference between the procedure of the older and the contemporary writer. In one sense, a drama solely of individuality makes the treatment of tragedy more clear and more forcible; in another and an obvious sense, it fails to make it so complete. The idea that a man has not only to struggle with the dark and mysterious forces of Nature, not only to carry on unequal warfare with cer-

tain innate tendencies of his own character, but that he is also a plaything in the hands of an irresistible fate—in that he is the child of his age, and cannot get beyond the bounds of that particular phase and stage of the social organism to which he belongs—clearly deepens, widens, enlarges, and renders more poignant the fate of the individual soul. Let us add, too, that the doctrine of heredity, as understood in a modern age, has little or nothing to do with Shakespeare's problems. It is a doctrine, right or wrong, born of contemporary science, and although it has a very definite influence upon the sphere of tragedy, we must not seek to read it into an Elizabethan age, or into the mind even of the greatest poet in the world.

The other point, equally important, is one to which I have already alluded—the practical side of Shakespeare's genius. I refer to it again, because it bears directly on the poet's treatment of the tragic heroes, and it has been often unduly ignored in the criticisms of commentators. Take, for instance, the brilliant chapters of Taine. If you had only this French critic to go by, you would imagine that Shakespeare was a man of unbridled passions, a

Bohemian of Bohemians, an artist living only in his world of art, capable merely of viewing the facts of existence and the qualities of his characters from the purely æsthetic, emotional, imaginative side. A German critic, on the other hand, so far as I can see, is mainly occupied with the attempt to show that Shakespeare was a man of considerable common sense, usually pointing a definite moral, and so little able to find inspiration in his own genius that he was always being moved to write because of some definite incident that happened to him in the course of his life. Does he write joyous comedies? That is because he was taken up by the Court, and saw before his eyes bright and fashionable ladies of society, whom he represents for us as Rosalind and Beatrice and Portia. Does he write tragedies? That must be because he had lost influence in Court, because he was upset by the fate of Raleigh or Essex, because the royal favour had been obscured. It is, doubtless, a useful exercise of ingenuity to construct a life of Shakespeare out of his writings, but I should have thought that the great warning against this method of

interpretation is furnished by his Sonnets. At all events, the analysis of his work as an artist has nothing to do with the supposed historic background. We do not know enough of the historic background to make this mode of interpretation other than fallible.

Much more difficult, however, is it to keep the two sides of Shakespeare's nature in just equipoise, to remember that although he was an artist, he never seems to have allowed himself to think that a world of reality did not exist; and that though he was a practical man, he yet could raise himself into a world of imagination, and understand, as no man has ever understood, all the obscure workings of emotion and passion and thought within the four corners of an individual soul. Do you suppose, despite all Shakespeare's sympathy with Romeo and Juliet, that the artist did not see how much ruin such wild and passionate love-making could produce? "Violent delights," says the Friar, "have violent ends." Or do you suppose that, because Othello is a noble character, regally broad in the range of his sympathies, towering head and shoulders above the men and women

with whom he was brought into contact, that Shakespeare did not know how awful is the catastrophe of an unbridled jealousy? It is in this respect that the theatrical representation of these plays is apt to put our thoughts in a wrong key. "Hamlet" too often ends with the death of its hero, although Shakespeare brings in his Fortinbras, as indicating the triumph of common sense. No tragedian, probably, who enacted the part of Romeo, would fail to bring down the curtain upon the double suicide of lover and loved, and yet it is the end of the play, with the comments of the elder men on the catastrophe, and the reconciliation of the two houses of Capulet and Montague, which rounds the drama into an intelligible whole. Human excesses, human sins, human failures, are the warp and the woof out of which tragic drama is made; but the artist, at least an artist as great and as sane as Shakespeare, will feel himself, and let you know through the management of his play, that all magnificent aberrations like Othello and Macbeth and Lear and Hamlet dash themselves in vain against the laws by which the world is governed.

Was, therefore, Shakespeare a be-



liever in poetic justice? No, certainly not in the narrow sense of the term. He worked much too freely, too much in the spirit of an artist, to be content with the narrow, precise apportionment of blame, making the villain fail and the good man succeed. There is none of this small didacticism about Shakespeare. He will fearlessly win our sympathies for his splendid failures. He will make Iago succeed in his diabolical scheme. He will let King Lear at the close of the play frantically clasp in his arms the dead body of Cordelia, albeit that our weaker nature is crying out for some happier ending. Good and evil are great facts in human life, and it is absurd to say that good always triumphs. Evil triumphs as well. A shallow optimism is the last theory of all to which a thinking man ought to consent. Looking at the mundane sphere in which the beneficent and maleficent forces are warring, we cannot say that everything is for the best in this best of possible worlds. But there is a higher form of poetic justice, which means nothing more and nothing less than being true to the facts. If history does not teach that the world is governed by moral laws, it is difficult to know what it does teach, for it

assuredly does not suggest a reign of chaos. And if this be so—and most certainly Shakespeare thought it was so—you can extract from Shakespeare's plays a great justification of the ways of Providence to men. Ask, for instance, whether our moral conscience is satisfied in his treatment of the human drama, and there can only be an affirmative reply. To talk of Shakespeare as a pessimist is absurd. The real pessimism is not the discovery that human happiness is unattainable. Plenty of men and students who are not pessimists have discovered that. The real pessimism is despair of human virtue, and that Shakespeare never so much as suggests. On the contrary he believes in human virtue, and paints it with a loving hand. Human virtue may often go down before the assaults of evil—Desdemona is ensnared in the webs spun by Iago—but, nevertheless, it is its own exceeding great reward; and the dead Cordelia in King Lear's arms triumphantly proclaims that self-devotion, whether it succeeds or fails, is the highest of mortal excellences.

What, indeed, is the responsibility which rests on a dramatic artist when he is reconstructing the data of life for

the purposes of his art? He is not, we are agreed, a mere imitator; he selects, adapts, fashions, rounds off his story. He is a creator, and in that sense he is actually a Providence. He stands to his characters, and the fate or fortune to which he exposes them in his little world, as the Divine Artificer of the universe stands to the big world. Woe be to him if he gives us a different lesson from what the big world teaches! Perdita, you will remember, in "The Winter's Tale," objected to gillyvors, because they were parti-coloured flowers that had been artificially produced—"Streaked gillyvors which some call Nature's bastards." But what does Polixenes answer? He gives the true theory of art as an addition to Nature, a selective, creating force:—

"Nature is made better by no mean,  
But Nature makes that mean; so over that art  
Which you say adds to Nature, is an art  
That Nature makes."

In other words, the dramatist recreates experience and in that sense adds, but his new creation must be true to Nature. Listen to what Lessing says in his "Dramaturgie":—"Out of the few links picked out by the poet, he ought to make a whole,

rounded in itself, that is fully explained out of itself where no difficulty arises without the solution being found in his plan. The whole of this earthly creator should be a mere outline of the whole of the eternal creator, should accustom us to the thought that as in Him all things are resolved to the best, so also it will be here; and the poet forgets his most noble calling when he forces into a narrow circle the incomprehensible ways of Providence, and purposely awakens our shudder thereat.”<sup>1</sup>

In how many ways can a man dash himself against the iron laws of the universe? In many ways, doubtless; but Shakespeare selects his examples with sovereign skill. We may even find some traces of that symmetrical arrangement before observed in dealing with the histories. There is one passion, ruinous when in excess, the passion of love. Of this Shakespeare gives us two examples—the youthful, wild, unthinking passion of Romeo, and the middle-aged dotage of Antony, “the doting mallard” who flies after Cleopatra to his death. So, again, there is the strong overmastering emotion which we call ambition, of

<sup>1</sup> Lessing's *Dramaturgie*, No. 79.

which we also have two examples. Ambition as manifested in intense will power, a dæmonic energy of volition, is shown us in Richard III., while ambition as a morbid, superstitious belief in himself and in his own star, the attitude of the imaginative mystic, is shown us in Macbeth. Love and ambition are two of the destroying influences in human nature, but there are many more besides. There is selfishness raised to the highest conceivable degree, a devouring egotism, of which once more we have two examples. Egotism may signify the pride of caste, a patrician feeling, an absurdly high estimate of personal value and personal strength, and then we have Coriolanus. Or else egotism may be shown in a different fashion, that peculiarly destructive form in which it renders old age so terrible a thing, the selfishness of a King Lear, a senile desire or weakness to annex and engross every form of consideration and love. Not yet have we exhausted the catalogue of ruinous vices. There is the vice of jealousy, combined with the belief that a man can claim vengeance as his own, as though he were a God-appointed instrument to execute punishment on feminine

frailty, as you find it in Othello. There is the vice of frantic pessimism, the despair of all human virtue and excellence, because the man has discovered in his own case the fickleness of fortune and his friends, as you see it in Timon of Athens. And last in the dreary list comes a more subtle disease, on which Shakespeare bestows especial pains, a disease that falls on the student, the moralist, the philosopher, a malady of introspection, the enormous fallacy of trying to impose your own ideals upon the world, as you find it both in Brutus and in Hamlet. There is reason to think that the two plays of "Julius Cæsar" and "Hamlet," were worked at by Shakespeare about the same time, for "Hamlet" contains a significant reference to the tragedy enacted on the Capitol, and Horatio proclaims himself to be "more an antique Roman than a Dane."

In all this portrait-gallery of the sins and frailty of humanity, which lead us straight to the sphere of tragedy, it is difficult to make one selection rather than another in illustrating the dramatist's conception of his problem. One characteristic above all belongs by indubitable birthmark



to every Shakesperian character. It has a certain infinity about it—a vague word for a necessarily vague quality. I mean that it opens large vistas, and is not exhausted by the enumeration of a few simple attributes. There are so many sides to Othello and Macbeth, to King Lear and to Hamlet, that we are forced to realize them not so much as inventions as small pieces of complex humanity itself. Nevertheless if we suppose that at a particular period in the development of Shakespeare's art he was wrestling with the deeper problems of existence, whether in his own person, or as illustrated among his contemporaries, we shall hardly be wrong in fixing upon two of his tragedies as the most significant and illustrative. Doubtless to Shakespeare, as to many men in that riotous Elizabethan period, there came the temptation to think that the whole world was well lost for love. In characteristic fashion, Shakespeare paints for us two ways in which the passion of love can influence men. It can redeem a man as it did Romeo. It can destroy a man as it did Mark Antony. Notice how skilfully we are shown that at the opening of the play Romeo was a man who loved rather



imaginatively than in reality. He had a sentimental tenderness for Rosaline, he uses the conventional terminology of lovers, he talks about Cupid and Dian's shaft, and the rest of the sickly folly of the enamoured. But Juliet converts him from the mere romance of love into a heart-whole passion, invading the entire personality. Before he was in love with Love, now he is in love with a woman, and his nature becomes infinitely stronger and purer. Listen to him when he is told the news of Juliet's feigned death. There is no fantastic literary rubbish which he thinks appropriate to such an event. Before he was more or less of a puppet pulled by alien wires, a plaything in the hands of fate; now he is a man. "I defy you, stars." Destiny has no longer hold of him. He is prepared "to shake the yoke of inauspicious stars from his world-wearied flesh," and without one word of poetical imagery it is plain Juliet with him now. "Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night." There is all the simplicity of a definite, manly resolve in which the whole nature is enlisted. From the external standpoint there is disaster, ruin, catastrophe, because

“violent delights have violent ends”; but from the inner spiritual side of the man’s nature, which concerns us in tragedy, there is a triumph even in defeat, a victory over weakness, an entire satisfaction for our moral conscience. Romeo has achieved the end of his life. He has died upon a kiss.

It is different with Mark Antony, because both the age and the character of the hero are different. The absolute self-surrender of a middle-aged man who ought to be conquering the world, and is conquered by a splendid courtesan, the serpent of old Nile, is not a noble thing at all; it is a despicable thing. But Shakespeare is too much of an artist not to surround this theme of passion so destructive to masculine energies with all the splendid light and colour of eastern magnificence. We cannot afford to despise either Antony or Cleopatra, because Shakespeare will not for a moment allow us to regard them otherwise than as august, grandiose, tragic personalities. Think how Milton treated much the same theme in his “Samson Agonistes,” and you will see the difference between a Puritan moralist and a sympathetic, human dramatist. Milton

cannot conceal his scorn of the degenerate Samson, he cannot refrain from righteous railing against his Delilah. But Antony is a Hercules, a demi-god, "the demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm and burgonet of men." He is a ruin, but a ruin not wanting in grandeur, the shell as it were of an imperial castle.

Both these two lovers, both Romeo and Antony, have as the co-partner of their fates the women they deserve. As a rule, Shakespeare made his women somewhat wanting in complex features. He lived in an age before the rise of what we call "Feminism," and his heroines, exhibiting as they do one or two well-marked characteristics, are never analysed as fully or as carefully as his men. It is a point, by the way, in which we shall find a difference between Elizabethan drama and the drama of Ibsen. But because Shakespeare's women have fewer elements they are, when they are intended to be strong, extremely direct and practical, with the clearest knowledge of what they want, and of the proper means to the desired end. Juliet, despite her tender age of fourteen years, is one of the most direct and practical young women that could be.

She knows precisely what she wants—an union with Romeo; and every action is clearly designed to bring about the result. It is she who suggests a marriage before the Friar; it is she who, when father and mother and nurse all forsake her, has the courage and the hardihood to carry out her objects in her own way. That is how she saves Romeo, lifting him up to the higher level of passionate love at which she herself lives. But the middle-aged lover Antony finds his destiny in a woman with a past, a woman to whom Antony's love was not so much a revelation of what human nature is capable of, as the latest and most supreme of her sensations. The portrait of Cleopatra is eminently fascinating, because she is neither true nor false, neither sincere nor insincere, but a compound of opposites, feminine, fascinating, a triumphant wanton. How clearly Shakespeare understood this character you can see from her wonderful death scene. The mode in which she chooses to die, poisoning herself with an asp, is silly and ridiculous enough, but true to life, because such a woman would have an instinctive horror of feeling pain. She is coquettish to the

very end, a little theatrical, very emotional, but to the last entirely captivating. She died as she had lived, a Helen, a Mary Queen of Scots, formed to be "a wonder and a wild desire," a siren of the Mediterranean, luring men to destruction on the rocks.

Apart from this theme of love, which, let us remember in passing, was not considered a proper subject for dramatic art in the Athenian drama before Euripides, we come to a very modern burden, the burden of intellectuality. Clearly this too was a form of temptation to which Shakespeare, or any man of the period, might well be prone. There was always the danger for the poet that, leading as he did an inner life, he might make the mistake of thinking that it exhausted all possibilities of existence. Do ideas govern the world? Yes and no. Their ultimate victory is certain, but to the man who dreams, who refuses to live the life of his day, they are often a subtle cause of ruin and failure. Think of Brutus, the most high-souled Roman, the man of the loftiest integrity, the husband who was worthy to have such a wife as Portia, the hero to whom in the play in which he bears so conspicuous a

part we extend all our sympathy. Yet confronted with a practical problem he failed, and gave the victory into the hands of a much inferior man for no other reason than because he applied ideal principles to an actual political crisis. Plato in his "Republic" thought it would never be well with states until the rulers were philosophers, but he admits that only at exceptional times, and for very short and extraordinary periods, could a philosopher rule a state. Brutus persuades himself that he killed Cæsar because he was a tyrant. In reality, he kills him because, born of a revolutionary line, he had nursed his youth on revolutionary ideals, and supposed that, when Rome was crying out for an autocratic ruler, she could still be managed, as in the age of republican simplicity, by a Senate and Consuls.

The malady of Hamlet is not very remote from this. At all events, it starts from much the same mistake. The tragedy of Hamlet is that a man of peculiar introspective temperament is called upon to settle a practical crisis. Hamlet knows this very well himself, and that makes the tragedy deeper. Brutus never doubted, when once his decision was



taken, that he was the right man to cure the evils of Rome; Hamlet doubted from the very beginning.

The time is out of joint. O curséd spite  
That ever I was born to set it right.

He has too fine, too distinguished, too intellectual a character to be the rough instrument which fate demanded. He has the fatal malady of analysing his own motives, which is generally destructive of action. If a man once begins by asking himself what will be the results and consequences of a definite act, he will find that at the moment of action his will is paralysed by excess of scrupulosity, as Hamlet's was, when with his drawn sword he saw his uncle praying. It was a disease of will from which Hamlet was suffering. In any other times it would not have been so fatal. In this particular time, when he was called upon to do a specific act—to avenge his father, and kill the usurper,—it is not he, but a man rather of the Fortinbras build, who will be the saviour of society. Observe, too, that, like many intellectual men, he cannot be sure of his own moods. He sees the ghost of his murdered father, but is it an honest ghost? Is it really his



father's spirit? Hamlet believes in it on the battlements of Elsinore, but he entirely disbelieves in another mood, when, despite the evidences of his senses, he talks of the bourn from which "no traveller returns." The traveller who had returned is dismissed apparently as a fantasy of his brain. And these supernatural visitings to such an analytic and introspective mind do not, as a matter of fact, supply him with the motive for his subsequent action. The ghost can make him put on an antic disposition, play with such creatures as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, deride the senile humours of Polonius, and lessen the torrent of his words against his mother. But what the ghost cannot do is to make him kill his uncle. He murders him at last, more or less accidentally, because his mother was poisoned and Laertes had played foul in the fencing bout. So curiously destructive of strong practical volition is a morbid intellectual tendency towards introspection, self-analysis, metaphysical speculation.

As Romeo had a heroine that suited him, as Antony had the partner which corresponded with his sensual extravagance, so, too, in the irony of fate,

has Hamlet that particular kind of woman who would make the tragedy most complete. The genius of great actresses has sometimes made us think that Ophelia was a lovable character. In reality she belongs to Shakespeare's category of weak women, who are sometimes good and weak, like Desdemona, and sometimes mean and weak, like Ophelia. When Hamlet comes to her in his soul agony, she is frightened—nothing more and nothing less; and all she knows of that inner conflict that is rending the heart of her lover is that his dress is out of order. She is the meek, empty-headed, foolish woman who makes a man sorry that he ever tried to win her confidence and her sympathy. Each reply she makes to Hamlet's earnest questioning betrays the shallowness of her soul. Think of the way in which Juliet could defy all those around her, and compare Ophelia's meek subservience. She will tell a lie if her father wishes her to; she will deliberately lend herself to a plot to ensnare her lover. Feeble, nerveless, without a spark of strength or native independence of character, she dies the death which is appropriate to her. None of the gloom and glamour of

suicide is hers. She piteously tumbles off a branch and is drowned.

Desdemona, too, is another of Shakespeare's weak women. She is the essence of simple goodness, she is an icicle of purity, but she is too naïve to comprehend all the wickedness and chicanery of humanity. Having linked her fortunes with one of the great elemental forces of the world, she is assuredly not big enough for the part she has assumed, and the fact that she is at once so good and so powerless deepens the tragedy of Othello's rash enterprise in matrimony. We need not think that any reason for the failure is to be found in the unwise union between dark and white races. The psychological contrast is quite sufficient. A stormy, jealous, emotional being like Othello, inasmuch as he gives much to his wife in the way of a large-minded confidence and trust, requires more from his wife than the gentle, pliant, innocent Desdemona can give him. Innocence is a great thing, but after all it is only a negative virtue, and it often fails in the rough thoroughfare of the world. Twice at least in the course of the play Shakespeare suggests, with Sophoclean irony,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See above, in § I., pp. 30, 31.

the inevitableness of the catastrophe. "Look to her, Moor," says Brabantio, in Act I. scene 3, "if thou hast eyes to see; she has deceived her father and may thee"; to which Othello responds, "My life upon her faith!" It was indeed his life that was played for and lost in this amazing marriage. And once again, later on, when the storms were beginning to gather round the devoted head of the heroine, Emilia suggests to Desdemona that the reason for Othello's strangeness is his jealousy. "Is he not jealous?" asks Iago's wife. Desdemona replies with scorn, "Who? He! I think the sun where he was born drew all such humours from him" (Act III. scene 4). What a stupendous admission of ignorance! How many wives would fail to discover that a husband was jealous, in a week, shall I say, or in a day after they had married him?

We might go through in this fashion the rest of the tragic characters of Shakespeare — Macbeth, the imaginative, ambitious villain; King Lear, the absorbing egotist, grown old, making demands on everyone round him for their reverence and love, and, like all egotists, unable to discern the true love of Cordelia, because she cannot

“heave her heart into her mouth” and speak the artificial words of affection; or, worst figure of all, Timon, the cynic and the pessimist, who, because he has found the unfaithfulness of friends, argues from a single instance to a general conclusion, and thinks that all friendships are false. It is more necessary for my purpose to discover how through these and other characters Shakespeare shapes his idea of tragedy. As in the ancient, so in the more modern dramatist, there is always the obscure, desperate conflict between the individual, and what for him appears destiny and fate. But because Shakespeare’s characters are typical, summing up in themselves, as it were, the general tendencies of things, there is often behind the individual catastrophe the suggestion, as it were, of a world catastrophe. Thus we miss half the overpowering significance of King Lear, unless we see behind the palsied figure of a broken old man, rebuking the heavens, which seem to conspire with his daughters against him, and reminding them in a splendid passage that they too are old, the picture of a world in ruins—as though the one human power, which was the great corrosive solvent of the

cosmos, was selfishness. But if we ask what this fate or destiny was, in the conception of our English dramatist, there is only one answer. Destiny is nothing but the man's character,—not an external, but an internal agency. Have you ever noticed at the very beginning of *Macbeth* how the witches say the very words with which *Macbeth* opens the scene? "So fair and foul a day I have not seen," says *Macbeth* as he comes on the blasted heath. Now listen to the earlier chant of the witches, "Fair is foul and foul is fair, Hover through the fog and filthy air." Could there be a more significant suggestion that what *Macbeth* is meeting is but his own wicked thoughts, his own half-understood purposes of grasping ambition and cruel murder? Naturally, therefore, if destiny is character, each man and each woman will regard the dominion of fate in accordance with his or her strength or weakness. Listen to the strong direct practical intelligence of *Helena* in "*All's Well that Ends Well*" (Act I. scene 1):—

"Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,  
Which we ascribe to heaven; the fated sky  
Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull  
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull."



Listen to Romeo when he had become indeed a man :—

“ Then I defy you, stars.”

Listen to Cassius, who more than any one else understood the proper means to the desired end (“ Julius Cæsar ” Act I. scene 2) :—

“ Men at some time are masters of their fates ;  
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars  
But in ourselves that we are underlings.”

The fact is that few students of philosophy or scientific thinkers can persuade themselves that man's will is free ; but every practical man at every moment of the day, or whenever he is initiating action, can never believe that his will is otherwise than free. Hamlet, the metaphysician, is a gentle fatalist. “ There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will.” “ If it be now, 'tis not to come ; if it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come ; the readiness is all.”

So, too, in “ King Lear ” we have a series of deliverances on this question, the deliverance in each case being true to the different characters. The good, stupid, honest Kent says bluntly, “ It is the stars, the stars above us, govern



our conditions"; and Gloucester, in the first agony of his suffering, seems to chide heaven as though it were malicious—"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, They kill us for their sport." He knew better later on, and attains the higher level which believes that the world is governed by justice, and that if we suffer we have earned our sufferings. "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices Make instruments to plague us." There is no such thing as blind, unreasoning destiny, which comes upon us from the outside and overbears our wills. We carry our own doom or happiness within ourselves. We must not, as King Lear wanted to do, take upon us "the mystery of things as if we were God's spies;" but within the range of human activity which is open to us we know that as adventures are to the adventurous, so are success and failure already implicit in our deserts. What is it that Maeterlinck says in his noble book "Wisdom and Destiny?" His words are almost an echo of Marcus Aurelius' meditations. "Let us always remember that nothing befalls us that is not of the nature of ourselves . . . Whether you climb up the mountain, or go down the hill to the valley;

whether you journey to the end of the world, or merely walk round your house, none but yourself shall you meet on the highway of fate. If Judas go forth to-night, it is towards Judas his steps will tend."<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare was an artist, and treated his themes from an artist's standpoint; but if you must find a lesson in the dramatic work of an artist, you will find that his tragedies are inspired through and through with the same thought. Real destiny is a man's own character.

<sup>1</sup> Maeterlinck's *Wisdom and Destiny*, Sec. 10

### III

"There are," I said, "diseased potatoes and there are sound potatoes."

Ibsen answered: "I am afraid none of the sound potatoes have come under my observation."

G. Brandes' *Ibsen and Björnson* (p. 76).

(Eng. trans).

THERE is a curious passage in one of Heine's prefaces in which he says that while writing his poems he seemed to hear the whirring of the wings of a bird above his head. He asked some of his brother poets in Berlin whether they had had a similar experience, but they only looked at each other with a strange expression, and declared that nothing of the kind had occurred to them.<sup>1</sup> The wings which Heine had heard, and the young Berlin poets had never heard, were the rush and whirr of new ideas. Only those who are conscious of this wing-winnowing are inspired by the thoughts of a newer era, and are awake when the dawn appears. To Euripides, at all events,

<sup>1</sup> Heine's preface to his *New Poems*.

who, though to some extent contemporary with the older poets Æschylus and Sophocles, was a whole age after them in thought, there must have come the strange sounds which Heine heard ; for no one more characteristically than he became the exponent of a period of revolution and change. It was a new heaven and a new earth, or, at all events, it was a new earth, which figured itself in his imagination, an earth in which rationalising thought, a clear logical intelligence, and a determination not to accept unverified and unverifiable dogmas wrought havoc with the older scheme of things. There was much in the contemporary state of Athens, so different from the Athens of the Persian wars, to explain and account for the transformation ; but the phenomenon itself which was being exhibited in the Ionic capital can be sufficiently interpreted from the spiritual or intellectual side alone. No one can be sure whether Euripides was the friend of Anaxagoras or of Socrates ; but the point is of little consequence, for there was a certain kinship between the two philosophers, and the dramatist may have caught the dominant notes of the newer era from either the one or the other. The older

Olympians were being stormed by a young divinity called after no names of imperial or Divine majesty, but by the simple term of "intelligence," "*νοῦς*." Whether the human analytic intelligence is applied to antique structures of religion, or superstition, or old-fashioned political theory, or hoary dogmas of morality, the result is always primarily destructive; and a chaotic period supervenes before reason can mould out of the scattered and inconsistent theories the fabric of a better and more intelligible world-order.

Shall we look at it on the side of ethics? There comes the discovery that there are no abstract moral laws, true for ever and in all places, but only recognised conventions which one country or city can adopt, and another community can reject. Shall we look at it from the side of political theory? We shall make strange discoveries as to the real seat of authority in a state, the meaning of justice, the rationale of civic law, the justification of state punishment. Shall we look at it from the side of religious belief? Here for the poet and the imaginative artist the acid seems to bite deeper still. Either the gods are

good, and then the stories told about them are false, or else the stories are true, and then the gods are no gods at all. How can Zeus and Apollo have carried out their dominion over the earth by means of actions reprobated by the better feeling of humanity? Cheating and stealing and adultery, these are the acts which the ancient legends impute to the gods, to say nothing of an absurd jealousy and a miserable system of favouritism. Such, speaking in general terms, was the character of the destructive work done by the Sophists and teachers of the new enlightenment. The ordinary conception held in Athens about Socrates was that his influence was exerted on similar lines. He was brought up on a charge of corrupting the youth. It was an absolutely unjust charge, if we may trust Plato, who, indeed, gives us a glorified Socrates. Yet even Socrates' great pupil has to allow that dialectics, the business of argument and discussion and controversy, taught young men to wrangle like puppies, and Aristotle said without hesitation that people ought to have come to years of discretion before they learnt moral philosophy. Euripides, however, lived in the flood

tide of these ideas, and whether he learnt from the lips of Anaxagoras the notion that intelligence was the supreme principle in the universe, or caught from Socrates the trick of argument and analysis of the current notions of the day, his dramas, ostensibly like some of the older ones, are yet inspired by a perfectly different spirit. The effect in his case is all the more interesting to us because there are many superficial and some real likenesses between the age of the Sophists in Greece and that spirit which has been called *fin de siècle* in our modern world.

Scepticism is, of course, the first result. Much learned controversy exists as to whether Euripides was really a sceptic ; but there is no manner of doubt that his handling of the older myths and his treatment of the divinities of Greece were conceived in a sceptical vein. Listen to the naïve way in which Ion, coming out of the temple in the early morning light, rebukes his patron god Apollo for the treatment he had meted out to his mother. "I must needs rebuke Phœbus," he says. "He betrays virgins and abandons them, and allows his own children to perish. Not so, Phœbus : since



you have the power, try to be virtuous. The gods punish a man who conducts himself badly. Is it just that the authors of the laws imposed on mortals should themselves transgress them?" Listen in "Andromache" to the words of the messenger who has told us of the death of Neoptolemus. "The god who inspires oracles, who reveals to all men the rules of justice, see how he has treated the son of Achilles. Like a villain he has wreaked vengeance for an ancient quarrel. Where, then, is his wisdom?" But, indeed, I need not quote examples which are familiar to all those who have read the plays of Euripides. No one was more daring than he in making the characters rebuke the gods for their extraordinarily low ethical standard. One of the apparent exceptions is furnished by the "Bacchantes," in which Euripides seems to recommend the worship of Dionysus. But he was writing for a Macedonian Court, and the meaning of the "Bacchantes" is one of the most contested points among Euripidean commentators.

Scepticism is the half-sister of pessimism, and the thinker who has adopted the one glides almost insen-

sibly into the other. Here we reach a point which is of peculiar importance to us in reference to the idea of tragedy, and I must be pardoned for dilating a little on this subject. It is obvious that tragedy itself is born of pessimism, and could scarcely be conceived as having any other origin. Unless a poet is keenly alive to the sufferings of humanity, unless he feels to the full the irony of mortals whose everyday dream is of happiness, and whose everyday experience is of disappointment and unhappiness, he would hardly adopt tragic themes for the exercise of his muse. Everything, however, turns on the meaning that we attach to this word pessimism, and the particular form in which it becomes the inspirer of dramatic efforts. You will remember that in the last lecture, when we were speaking of the pessimism that was in Shakespeare, I attempted to distinguish between the pessimism which despaired of human happiness and the pessimism which despaired of human virtue. That is looking at the matter from the point of view of the moralist. Now we must occupy ourselves with the standpoint of the artist.

There are some forms of the philo-

sophic theory of pessimism which appear to cut at the very root of the artistic impulse. If they ever produce fruit in the imaginative sphere, the fruitage is singularly bitter, stunted, abortive. Take, for instance, a scheme like that of Schopenhauer. Beginning with an assurance that there is a large preponderance of misery over happiness in this world, he explains that we are all the victims of a great, mysterious, blind, but all-powerful force which he calls "the will to live." If you and I and all other men and women are alike miserable, the reason is that we are at once the creatures and playthings of a great impersonal, natural volition, driving us to live our dreary lives, to fear death, and cling to existence, whether we will or no. Intelligence which is given to the human race is the dreariest of mockeries, for it is powerless against this insatiable craving. All that intelligence can do is to throw light upon the turmoil, to make us comprehend the fatal conditions in which we are ensnared, and thus to make us more unhappy than we were before. Now observe the moral which Schopenhauer draws from his philosophical scheme. He

tells us that we should deny the will to live, not so much by suicide—for that would be a wilful act, and our object is to get rid of will—but by asceticism, self-restraint, resignation to passivity, such as was practised and is now practised in the East.

Now, if we suppose that any dramatic artist accepted Schopenhauer as his guide, philosopher and friend, he would have to believe that passivity was better than activity, and would be essaying the almost impossible task of painting by means of action a goal of inaction. The essence of drama is human activity; the very word signifies action; and the idea is absolutely eviscerated of all meaning by the assumption that a denial of the will to live is our real object. Schopenhauer's own notion of tragedy illustrates this. It is only at best a sort of alleviation or temporary consolation—part and parcel, therefore, of that lamentable gift of intelligence which shows how hideous is the chaos in which we live. "What gives to all tragedy, in whatever form it may appear, the peculiar tendency towards the sublime is the awakening of the knowledge that the world, life, can afford us no true pleasure, and consequently is not

worthy of our attachment. In this consists the tragic spirit; it therefore leads to resignation." <sup>1</sup> But the artist must believe in his work as a free and joyous form of activity, not assuredly as a mere anæsthetic, an anodyne, a mode of sending to sleep a ceaseless grumble of indignation and despair.

Such pessimism as this is, I say, for the most part fruitless, or if it bear fruit, such fruit is atrophied, abortive, bitter, like dead sea-apples in the mouth. It is difficult, perhaps, to suggest a work of art which is conceived in this spirit, and is the direct fruit of Schopenhauer's pessimism. But perhaps Mr. Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* comes the nearest to it, a work which depresses human vitality, and therefore, as I take it, sins against humanity. Better examples can perhaps be found in some of Zola's novels — *L'Assommoir*, *La Terre*, and others.

Nevertheless, the conditions of life may be regarded as miserable, and yet human actions stand on a higher plane than before. On a dark background of gloom the higher qualities of the human being — his love, devotion, passion, self-denial, reckless-

<sup>1</sup> Schopenhauer's " *World as Will and Idea*," Book iii. cap. 37.

ness—may stand out in almost radiant colours. Let us grant with the pessimist that man, as he exists in the midst of a nature that is alien to him, and under social conditions which stunt or retard his growth, is not likely to secure much happiness. Nature, as we know, is harsh and cruel, and her laws are those which are terrible for the individual, though helpful, it may be, to the world's progress—the laws of struggle for existence, the survival of the fittest, and development by means of unlimited competition. Or if we take it from another side of science—the science of biology—there is reason to suppose that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children, and that many men and women begin their careers crippled and maimed by a hereditary taint. Or once more, the social order is found to be oppressive, framed as it is for the convenience of the majority—the incarnation of triumphant commonplace, the victory of the conventionally useful rather than the ideally good, the despotism of a majority which, if not always wrong, as Dr. Stockmann declares in Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, is at least quite as often wrong as right. Such things may well



breed a sort of pessimism, may produce for the thinker and philosophic student a mood of nervelessness and gloom. But the artist who approaches these subjects not as a thinker or as a student, but as an observer of the flash and play of human life, sees that on this background of darkness he can paint his human beings with all their rich vitality and spontaneousness of effort, transfigured and ennobled by contrast. And he has this justification to begin with—that all the nobler and higher activities of man, whether in founding States, creating rules of morality, or even building hospitals, are done in the teeth of nature, and constitute a direct challenge to the dull, mechanical cruelty of her laws. But the sovereign vindication for the artist is the exceeding beauty of all human vitalities, whether they are effective or ineffective, whether they succeed or fail. It is life as such that the artist loves, strong, exuberant, magnificent life, defying laws of time and space, and conquering the impossible—circumscribed, indeed, if we look at its scientific conditions, but absolutely free and untrammelled in its spiritual essence. If an artist who feels the



intoxication of life writes tragedies, they do not in reality depress us, because, instead of making the pulse flag and beat slower, they stir us, as it were, with a trumpet-call, they cause the blood to flow more eagerly through our veins. Did any one ever feel his sense of vitality lowered by either reading or seeing on the stage the ruin of Othello or the tragedy of Lear? It is more difficult to find contemporary examples, but one can feel much the same thing with regard to many even of the modern novelists whose books are often classed as pessimistic. Take, for instance, the two books of that strong, original writer, who calls herself "Zack"—*On Trial* and *Life is Life*. They are pessimistic enough in all conscience, if we mean by the word that the authoress is keenly conscious of the sorrow of things. But the artist has known how to enhance the dignity of human effort, even when she proclaims it to be hopeless. We do grievous wrong to works of art if we dismiss them because they seem to preach a gloomy moral. There is a gloom which is paralysing; there is another gloom which a man or woman of strong creative personality can turn

into a very mainspring of pulsing action and life.<sup>1</sup>

If, therefore, we class Euripides as a pessimist, we must be careful to define what kind of pessimism he represents. He is an apt parallel to the moderns because he comes after the first primitive artistic impulse has waned; he lives in an age when for the majority the native hue of resolution had been sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. But on a canvas of vacillation and doubt, with a background of scepticism as to the nature and existence of the gods and a resolute acknowledgment that life is in many respects evil, he paints, with all the more touching and picturesque pathos, suffering, struggling, doomed, passionate, but always vigorous humanity. It is the pathos of things, indeed, the *lacrimæ rerum* which so occupies Euripides that he becomes almost romantic in the treatment of his themes. It is this sense of pathos and pity which made Aristotle call him the most tragic of the poets, and was in the mind doubtless of Mrs. Browning when she wrote of

<sup>1</sup> See an essay by Mr. William Archer (contributed to the *Fortnightly Review*), entitled "Tragedy and Pessimism."

“Euripides the human with his droppings of warm tears.” Men and women in the Euripidean drama are always alive: they sin passionately, they transgress all moral and divine laws; they destroy one another with a fierce ferocity, they make glorious failures—but they are vital. And, just because the play of life was so infinitely interesting to Euripides, whether it was Anaxagoras who taught him this lesson or Socrates or his own artistic genius, he can put into clear light quite as many virtues as are the vices of which he is so prodigal. Many critics have called him misogynist, and certainly he says very hard things of the female sex. As a matter of fact, in the tragi-comedy of existence, he realizes far more clearly than his predecessors the extraordinary value from an artistic standpoint of women-characters. He knows how they can embroil and embellish human things, how they can at once disturb and improve, ruin and save. By the side, therefore, of his splendidly villainous women like Phaedra and Medea and Stheneboea, women who break through every natural impulse with undaunted recklessness, he will give you women who are patterns of high moral duty, women

filled through and through with the idea of self-sacrifice, willing victims, like Polyxena and the beautiful Iphigeneia—not as in the older dramatist killed by her father, but going voluntarily to the altar for the sake of the Trojan expedition. So, too, there is no higher example of conjugal love than that of Alcestis, who died for her unworthy lord.

Like Virgil after him, Euripides sees also the artistic value of first love between man and maid. This was a complete innovation in tragedy. Plato thought that love itself was not a worthy theme in drama. Aristophanes derides it. But the poet's contemporaries, who were themselves perhaps learning a softer mood of romance, as the great patriotic impulses of the Persian wars were dying away, appreciated the novelty as though it were indeed a revelation. Take the young Haemon with his love of Antigone, cheerfully dying for her sake; or take the moving treatment of "Perseus and Andromeda," which seems to have captivated Athenian audiences though it only exists for us in fragments. Andromeda, as Professor Lewis Campbell remarks in his interesting book on Greek tragedy,

says the very words to her deliverer which Miranda in "The Tempest" says to Ferdinand. "Sir, take me with you, whether as your servant, or wife, or handmaid," anticipates Miranda's "To be your fellow you may deny me, but I will be your servant, whether you will or no." Euripides may or may not have been a misogynist, but at all events he was one of the earliest of the "Feminists," a protagonist in that movement which so profoundly influences the Norwegian dramatist Ibsen.

In what I have said I have already anticipated some of the conditions of a modern age. In a remarkable speech to a club of working men at Drontheim in 1885, Ibsen declared that "the Revolution now preparing in Europe is chiefly concerned with the future of the Workers and the Women. In this I place all my hopes and expectations, and for this I will work all my life." Here are certainly two points which will mark the life-work of an advanced thinker in contemporary times. The rise of what is known as the Feminist Movement, the echoes of which are even heard in France, as proved by such remarkable novels as *Femmes Nouvelles*, by the Brothers Margueritte, and *Une Nouvelle Douleur*,

by Jules Bois, must naturally alter the point of view of any dramatist who is concerned with the social aspects of the era.<sup>1</sup> Themes therefore, which treat of the contrast between the two sexes, and of woman's economic, moral and intellectual emancipation, come to the forefront, and indeed could scarcely be expected to be absent in any author who is inspired by the newer lights. So, too, with regard to the other great question, which in its general tendency is called Socialism. The various classes of society, their differences of station, their life struggle, the contrast between rich and poor, the great gulf fixed between social influence and social impotence, these will not leave themselves without evidence in the work of a modern thinker. Add to these a characteristic mark of the latter part of the 19th century—the solution of all questions on scientific grounds and by means of scientific formulæ—and we have the main ingredients of that environment in the midst of which a contemporary dramatist has to work. Materialism—

<sup>1</sup> The note is, of course, different in England and France. In England, it is the practical inconvenience of the revolting female; in France it is the voluble indignation of the baffled male.

a practical materialism which makes wealth one of the objects of men's lives, and a theoretical materialism which makes the doctor the great hero of modern life, because all diseases, spiritual or mental, are in the last resort declared to be physical; a social order in which woman is acclaimed as the arbiter of her own destiny—these are the general aspects, the contemporary features which art has to work with, and, if possible, mould to her own purpose.

There is, however, another point which, for our immediate object, is more important still. We are not dealing with a young civilization such as was to be found in Greece in the 6th century B.C., and in Italy in the early Renaissance. We are dealing with a society which has lost, to a large extent, its faith in ideals, which has become sceptical of its own efforts, more than a little weary of the higher aims, more and more content to relapse on the lower levels of life and thought. To an age of this kind, to a civilization which can be described in these terms, how will the general idea of tragedy be altered? It depended, you will remember, on a certain equipoise between an external compelling



fate and an internal power of initiative and resistance. The one was the element of necessity, the impersonal order of the universe; the other was the element of freedom, the personal fount and source of action. Now, when Shakespeare was attracted by this problem—the sphere allowed to human volition in the midst of a great overpowering environment—he slowly worked towards a conclusion which was consistent with his own energy of temperament and with the general characteristics of his age, that what we mean by Destiny and Fate is nothing more nor less than a man's character. Man has not to look outside for the impulses which govern him, but the tyrants which rule his birth are found within the four walls of his own personality. Such a doctrine might suit the strong youthful times of art and of a nation's vigour, because, under such conditions, the value of human effort is recognised as the one great thing in the universe; but when the times have grown older, when there has appeared a certain lassitude in art and in national existence, such a doctrine is too hard to be borne. It is so much easier for those who are already fatigued and wearied

with much experience and much knowledge of the fallaciousness and failure of human effort to say that destiny comes from the outside, and is an irresistible force overbearing human wills. In Maeterlinck, for instance, you find the conclusion that man is the plaything, the sport of Destiny. At all events this is true of Maeterlinck's earlier dramas, where the human figure is so faintly drawn that the notion of spontaneity or freedom is absurd and impossible. "Pelleas and Melisande" were both the victims of fate which they could not control; so, too, were Aglavaine and Selysette; so, too, was the unlucky Princess Maleine. If you reduce human vitality to a thin, almost incorporeal vapour, if, instead of human beings that have length, breadth and thickness, you have frescoes on a wall, it is absurd to ask if things like these can alter their fates, or recognise that the supreme fate lies in their character. They will be driven hither and thither as leaves in a wind, puppets dangled on wires over which they have no control, dolls which the dramatist takes out, dresses up, and, when they have finished their task, puts into the box again. What Maeterlinck will do

hereafter is another matter. He has written a fine book on *Destiny and Character*, and for aught we know may be devising in his mind quite other characters and dramas from those with which we are at present conversant.<sup>1</sup>

It is more than commonly difficult to arrive at any just estimate of the position of Ibsen as a dramatist. It would not be true to say of him, as I venture to say about Maeterlinck, that he depresses the sense of human vitality. His thought, if not always quite clear, is always vigorous; he has a singular grasp of many of the insistent problems that vex the modern world, and for reasons that are connected with his unique personality, he wields a curious power of fascination in many ways disturbing to the judgment. There is much of the sorcerer in him, so that however much one may dislike his themes, he holds us, like the Ancient Mariner, with his glittering eye, compelling us to read what he has to say to the last page. More-

<sup>1</sup> In what I have said I am only dealing with the dramatic qualities of Maeterlinck. The poetic qualities, the haunting and suggestive beauty of his scenes and some of his lines, are quite another matter.

over, he is so unconventional that he gives a vivid impression of originality, not always, I think, quite deserved. Many of his social themes, for instance, appear in French dramatists, who raise, though in a different form, the precise questions which Ibsen raises. But no one could deny him the name of a dramatist. He is a master of theatrical technique, in the presentment of his themes, and in the evolution of such plot as he allows himself. Both his characters and the phrases which from time to time he puts into their mouth have a distinct power over our imagination, so that they become unforgettable. Indeed, I might go further. They obsess the mind like a nightmare that we should like to shake off, but cannot. If all this means anything, it means that Ibsen is a real dramatist. Think, for instance, in one of the least satisfactory of his dramas, "Little Eyolf," how admirably the first act is arranged, how clearly it puts the issues before us, how instantly we understand the situation of the father and mother now that their boy is lost. Sometimes, as in this case, Ibsen begins with a catastrophe, and works out its consequences; sometimes, as in "John Gabriel Borkman,"

the catastrophe has happened before the curtain goes up. In each case we are put as close as possible to the critical moment, and the concentration of interest which is thereby gained is found to be of no little dramatic value. The Norwegian writer prefers to work analytically rather than synthetically. He does not show how the tragedy grows, but, breaking it into its component parts, he traces the effects of the tragedy on his characters.

Nevertheless there remains one constant quality for which it is not easy to find a word. It is a quality of grimness, of ruggedness, of irritability, as though life and the world had got on his nerves and filled him with spleen. His dramas are never written in a serene artistic temper, but too often represent the unfathomable indignation of the idealist who looks from Dan to Beersheba and finds the whole country barren. It is not an uncommon effect of analysis that it leaves few of the fair structures of life standing. The analytic mind, whether in the man of science or in a disappointed and thwarted poet like Ibsen, by resolving a thing into its component parts, loses the sense of its general value, mars its beauty, destroys its serviceableness

in the order of the universe. We know, for instance, how victorious analysis, in the sphere of practical and moral science, has done its best to resolve the notion of duty into convenience or pleasure or personal utility, and the idea of conscience into an inherited fear of the spirits of dead ancestors. Something of the same kind must happen when an isolated thinker like Ibsen probes the ordinary conventions of social life and finds them hollow, taps at all the shutters and discovers that what is behind them is valueless, throws open the closet doors and reveals the skeletons, tears the veil from human affections, and displays their meanness and littleness. Mankind must appear very despicable to a man who makes Peer Gynt the hero of a drama, paints the conventional husband under the form of a self-satisfied idiot like Helmer, and has an especial fondness for introducing the Norwegian emancipated young woman as the destroyer of connubial felicity. The human animal is either a knave or a fool and generally contemptible; nor does Ibsen even spare men like Master-Builder Solness, or wounded Napoleons like Borkman, albeit that they are supposed to enlist our sympathies.



It is not an age for the male being, Ibsen would seem to tell us; on the other hand, it is emphatically an age for the female being. In this, of course, the dramatist is true to the ideas of his century, the latter half of which has been overridden by the claim of women to fashion their own world as they will, to succeed or fail, self-taught and independent, and to have no kind or manner of reverence for hoary social institutions. In Ibsen the woman is often treated with a tenderness which stands out in vivid contrast with his natural moral suspiciousness. Take, for instance, these lines from an early play, "The Pretenders." The King says, "Every fair memory from those days have I wasted or let slip"; and Ingeborg, the woman, replies, "It is man's right," or in the later edition, "It is your right to forget." "And, meantime," the male continues, "You, Ingeborg, loving, faithful woman, have sat there in the north, guarding and treasuring your memories in ice-cold loneliness." To which the woman simply answers, "It was my happiness to remember." As she leaves the stage she utters the beautiful words, "To love, to sacrifice all, and be forgotten; that is woman's



saga." Although this little dialogue is conceived in a tender and gracious spirit, it reminds one of those keen heart thrusts which pass between husband and wife in "A Doll's House." Helmer: "No man sacrifices his honour even for one he loves." Nora: "Millions of women have done so." We cannot easily forget the piteous wife of the Master-BUILDER who has kept all her old dolls' clothes in a drawer; nor, better still, the figure of Agnes in "Brand." Agnes, poring over her little dead boy's suits, or placing her candle in the window so that its light may fall across the snow on his grave, and give the little one a gleam of Christmas comfort, is drawn with some of the most exquisite touches, full of a soft and radiant sweetness in the midst of an almost habitual gloom. Nor can the man be said to have failed in understanding the feminine nature who has drawn such remarkable figures as Rebecca in "Rosmersholm" and Hedda Gabler in the play called after her name. You will find, I think, that many actresses have liked to act in Ibsen's plays because the heroine appeals to them. Even Eleanora Duse has acted in "A Doll's House," albeit that her masterful vitality and the

richness of her artistic nature made the little butterfly Nora, who suddenly wants to discover "whether society is right or she is," a more paradoxical character than before.

There is, however, in Ibsen, despite the fact that he is above all a thinker and a student, a certain incoherence of ideas which has sometimes a very baffling and confusing effect. Partly this is no doubt due to the fact that some of his earlier dramas were written under the inspiration of a Danish thinker, Soren Kirkegaard, an influence which evaporated when he executed his later studies. The tragedy of "Brand" and the work "Love's Comedy," which, thanks to Professor Herford, those of us who do not know Norwegian can now peruse for ourselves, are especially overshadowed by the thoughts of Kirkegaard. I say "overshadowed," because of all the thinkers who have made life difficult for us mortals this Danish philosopher is the most paradoxical. He is an idealist, who seems to have begun in the school of Kant, but his paradoxes are even more remarkable than those famous antinomies of reason and experience which made the German philosopher of Königsberg so full of

hard sayings even for a Teutonic audience. In "Brand," for instance, the Kirkegaardian God, whom the hero worships, is a deity who demands the most appalling sacrifices of all human ties and associations before he can be approached and understood, or subsequently revealed as a *deus caritatis*. Brand lets his mother go to hell, is the cause of the death of his own child, and finally sacrifices his wife—all in the pursuit of an ideal righteousness, a peculiar state of will, wholly remote from our actual life in some impossible transcendental sphere. How a God who required such sacrifices as these, who demanded so urgently and cruelly that all human feelings should be eradicated, can be afterwards proclaimed as the god of love, when his sovereign power had emptied such a word of all meaning, is impossible to understand.

Observe, too, a curious cynicism with which this pursuit of paradoxical idealism manifests itself in "Love's Comedy." In a boarding-house are collected a number of young men and maidens, mostly ordinary and conventional, under the care of a lady who boasts herself to be one of the most successful match-makers of her time.

But there is one thinker, Falk, and one true woman, Swanhild, who stand out above the common herd. They are the predestined lovers, because each had understood in the other where the need of true companionship lay, and because they had real spiritual affinities. Nevertheless, when this love is mutually confessed, they decide to separate, and Swanhild elects to marry a practical elderly merchant, Guldstad. Why? Because love is such a rare thing, it has such a delicate essence of its own, that when caught in the nets of matrimony it is only too apt to disappear. It is better to have loved and to remember, than to love and get married. Love which prompts the need of union is apparently the very thing which dies when the union is consummated. Of course such a doctrine has an obvious commonsense truth of its own, but for the idealist it is based on a confusion between the material form and the spiritual essence of love. Passion, being a fugitive and inconsistent thing, may and will certainly die, but the butterfly will often soar with all the brighter colours because the chrysalis-shape has been thrown off. Observe, however, the sort of moral which the mocking spirit

of Ibsen seems to draw from his play. Conventional marriages—*mariages de convenance*—can safely be recommended. No injury can be done by them, no mortal wound inflicted on love. And yet this is the man who afterwards will storm and rail against conventional marriages, because they destroy human individuality. Cynically to recommend an union which is afterwards found destructive to the human soul, betrays what I venture to call incoherence of ideas. Nor is this the only form in which such incoherence is exhibited. There is a tendency in many of the later plays to employ high-sounding phrases apparently of deep symbolical value, but which on examination seem to contain but little or nothing. We hear of “the great law of Change,” a pretentious phrase to signify that human character is more or less fickle; or “the great law of Retribution,” with which, indeed, every dramatist should deal without investing it with capital letters. Nor shall I hesitate to say that over and over again the word “Liberty” is used as if it could only mean irresponsibility. Sometimes the freedom for which Ibsen is constantly pining is hardly to be distinguished from license.

I touch with hesitation on another point which I believe forms a somewhat envenomed subject of debate between the older and the newer schools of criticism. I refer to a certain poverty of *mise-en-scène*, a designed squalor in the range and meaning of the plot, a provincialism, as it were, in the intrigue and management of Ibsen's dramas. You will remember that Matthew Arnold believed that the only true literature was the literature of the centre, something that belonged to the main line of literary development on the ground of its style, its manner of treatment, its arrangement of data. Ibsen's literature could never be described as that of the centre. Perhaps the time has come when literature ought no longer to belong to the centre but to the circumference, and there are many signs among our contemporary writers that they have definitely accepted this view of the circumference as the chief object of their interest. [Meanwhile, from the point of view of tragedy, which Aristotle said ought to deal with great things, and which has been depicted in poetry as tragedy "with purple pall," as though some regal splendour should belong to those whose ruin is depicted before



our eyes, the tragic drama that you find in Ibsen is singularly mean, commonplace, parochial—as if Apollo, who once entered the house of Admetus, was now told to take up his habitation in a back parlour in South Hampstead. There may be tragedies in South Hampstead, although experience does not consistently testify to the fact; but, at all events from the historic and traditional stand-point, tragedy is more likely to concern itself with Glamys Castle, Melrose Abbey, Carisbrooke, or even with Carlton House Terrace.

Behind some of the grandiose tragedies of Shakespeare, there is the suggestion of a world-catastrophe, as if palsied King Lear shaking his menacing finger at the waterspouts was the crazy prophet of a cosmic ruin. Such an atmosphere never surrounds the Ibsen drama. For instance, “The Enemy of the People,” is a play on much the same subject as “Prometheus Vinctus.” In both there is the picture of the one man, never so strong as when he is most alone, waging, on the ground of his superior knowledge and insight, war against the forces of ignorance, and blind, unreasoning force. Dr. Stockmann is a Prometheus, a Prometheus who has



his front windows broken, instead of having his liver eaten by Zeus' eagle. In the one case the scene is laid in the Caucasus with winged messengers of Heaven, with patient or impatient victims of divine injustice, thronging the stage ; in the other case the scene is laid in the editorial room of a provincial newspaper, with disputes between the business manager and a contributor, and a general apparatus of printers' devils to take the place of Io and the daughters of Oceanus. There is something in the "grand manner" after all !

The same result is arrived at if we study most of the social dramas by which Ibsen has made himself notorious. There is that triumphant masterpiece of squalid obscurity, with all its incisive analysis of a petty woman's soul, which is called "Hedda Gabler," or there is that dreary record of provincial meanness and pessimism enshrined in the exceedingly clever play entitled "The Wild Duck." Neither the heroines nor the heroes are really great. Perhaps Ibsen has taken peculiar pains to destroy the titles of his heroes and heroines to greatness. Was, for instance, Master-BUILDER Solness an architect of commanding

rank? Was John Gabriel Borkman a real Napoleon of finance? In both instances you have a peculiarly poignant picture of success followed by failure; but are the characters typical enough to make us feel that they are decisive examples of masterful skill or masterful rapacity? Solness is almost a symbolical figure, and the symbolic character tends to failure as an ordinary human being. Just as a mere phase of individual idiosyncrasy will not necessarily make a personage dramatic, so, too, will any character in a tragedy fail to bring home to us the desolation of failure, unless he be in a real sense not symbolic but typical.<sup>1</sup>

What, in fact, is Ibsen's idea of tragedy? As far as I can see, it is the failure on the part of a given individual to achieve his mission. In some dim way we realize that the brokendown heroes or heroines of Ibsen have had some task which they ought to have been able to perform, and some object of life which, under happier circumstances, they might have achieved, and their disappointment and disgust make the

<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to distinguish between a symbolic figure and a typical figure. A symbolic figure is an abstraction; a typical figure may be full of the ripe juices of humanity.

tragedy. This, of course, might be the description of every tragedy in the world's history. To know that one has a life vocation, to sin against it, and consequently to acknowledge oneself a failure, is of the very essence of the tragic idea. Nevertheless, if we are thinking of the impression upon ourselves, the character of the personages and the circumstances which are too strong for them have both to be considered. Well, the indubitably great thing about Ibsen's characters, perhaps the only great thing about them, is their vanity; while the circumstances against which they have to struggle are, for the most part, relative to the circumscribed conditions of life in a young, crude, immature civilization in Norway. We know that when Ibsen had produced his extraordinarily impressive play of "Ghosts," and found that instead of sympathy he had won derision, he shook the dust off his feet against his native country and lived abroad. He realized that he was too advanced in thought and feeling for his Norwegian home. He is always full of the idea that the cramping circumstances of life in Norway are fatal to individuality, to human liberty. But he is a real revolutionary in this

respect, that he does not care for liberty as a possession but only as a pursuit. If heaven were to offer him freedom in a socialistic community on the one hand, and a vehement conflict on behalf of liberty in an old aristocratic and oligarchic state on the other hand, he would unhesitatingly choose the latter. For him it is the conflict which is sweet, not the victory. Nor is he a pessimist in the proper sense of the term. He does not despair of human happiness under all circumstances, he only despairs of it under special and limited conditions. So much of the early idealism belongs to the disappointed and bitter poet that he thinks happiness well worth striving for. He will put all social institutions into the melting-pot, and wage ceaseless war against the established, the conventional, and the decorous, because the individual human being has a right to struggle ceaselessly for happiness. The new Ibsen play, "When we Dead Awaken," leads to much the same conclusions.

I have left myself but small space in which to deal with the contemporary movements of the drama. For many reasons it is better that I should pass over such points as still remain with

only a brief notice. There is something invidious, perhaps almost distasteful, in the criticism of one who has no very large knowledge of the English theatre, and yet ventures to lay down dogmas in an authoritative way on artists who know their business a great deal better than he can know it. One or two general remarks, however, may be hazarded. In the present age there is no particular liking or room for tragedy. The world is apt to shut its eyes to the deeper aspects of existence, because any attempt to pierce below the surface is held to involve unpleasantness. Comedy may or may not be a great success, but at all events it is far more likely to win its triumphs in an epicurean age than its elder sister, tragedy. People go to the theatre in order to be amused and to laugh; they hardly care to be made to feel. Some of the most earnest work of contemporary authors falls flat because it is held to be out of tune with fashionable surroundings of leisure and wealth, and artists themselves acquire a wilful petulance and an accent of revolt owing to this atmosphere of carelessness or apathy. There is, too, that phenomenon, the literary drama, which has a paralysing

effect,—the drama, never intended to be acted, which under present circumstances comes to be recognised as the only form of dramatic writing that the leaders of the literary world care to essay. Many of Browning's dramas belong to this class, all of Swinburne's, and, according to some critics, a good many of Tennyson's. Nevertheless, there are some signs, hopeful, encouraging signs, of a return to serious dramatic writing. There is the work of Mr. Laurence Irving and of Mr. Esmond, by no means devoid of promise. Quite recently we have been reading Mr. Stephen Phillips' "Paolo and Francesca," in which the beautiful legend of Dante has received a worthy setting of literary beauty; and Mrs. Craigie's "Osbern and Ursyne," vigorous, poetical, and rife with sincere emotion.

But, after all, the great reason for optimism with regard to the future is the fact that Mr. Pinero has given us in our modern age a play which is a masterpiece — "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." Hereafter we shall know better, I think, than we do now how great an achievement Mr. Pinero's "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" really is, how true a tragedy in form, man-



agement and style. We stand too close to it at present to see its true proportions, and the real issue disappears because it is classed not only among other plays of his, but superficially described as a study after the model of Ibsen. In form it is much more like a play of the school of Dumas the younger, although Dumas did not often write anything half so good. The character of Paula Tanqueray is one of the most triumphant creations which has ever been composed for the stage, in the fearlessness and truth of its portraiture and the artistic cunning of its presentment. Dumas wrote "*La Dame aux Camélias*" when he was a young man; Mr. Pinero wrote "*The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*" in the maturity of his powers. While the one gives a theatrical glorification of the courtesan, the other dares to draw her as she really is, in all the pathetically good instincts, and also the littleness and bitterness of her artificially developed soul. The style is in every sense worthy of the theme; indeed, here and there, are classical passages, classical in their restraint, sobriety, and clear-cut form. Listen to the following, when Aubrey and his wife are sitting amid the hopeless ruin of their



fortunes, discussing the probability or possibility of beginning again. The sentences ring with suppressed emotion, but the logical situation is exposed with a master's hand.

*Aubrey.* We'll make our calculations solely for the future, talk about the future, think about the future.

*Paula.* I believe the future is only the past again, entered through another gate.

*Aubrey.* That's an awful belief.

*Paula.* To-night proves it. You must see now that, do what we will, go where we will, you'll be continually reminded of—what I was. I see it.

*Aubrey.* You're frightened to-night; meeting this man has frightened you. But that sort of thing isn't likely to recur. The world isn't quite so small as all that.

*Paula.* Isn't it? The only great distances it contains are those we carry within ourselves—the distances that separate husbands and wives, for instance. And so it'll be with us. You'll do your best—oh, I know that—you're a good fellow. But circumstances will be too strong for you in the end, mark my words.

*Aubrey.* Paula !

*Paula.* Of course I'm pretty now—I'm pretty still—and a pretty woman, whatever else she may be, is always—well, endurable. But even now I notice that the lines of my face are getting deeper; so are the hollows about my eyes. Yes, my face is covered with little shadows that usen't to be there. Oh, I know I'm "going off." I hate paint and dye and those messes, but by-and-by I shall drift the way of the others; I shan't be able to help myself. And then, some day—perhaps very suddenly, under a queer fantastic light at night or in the glare of the morning—that horrid, irresistible truth that

physical repulsion forces on men and women will come to you, and you'll sicken at me.

*Aubrey.* I!

*Paula.* You'll see me then at last with other people's eyes, you'll see me just as your daughter does now, as all the wholesome folks see women like me. And I shall have no weapon to fight with—not one serviceable little bit of prettiness left me to defend myself with. A worn-out creature, broken up, very likely some time before I ought to be—my hair bright, my eyes dull, my body too thin or too stout, my cheeks raddled and ruddled—a ghost, a wreck, a caricature, a candle that gutters, call such an end what you like! Oh, Aubrey, what shall I be able to say to you then? And this is the future you talk about! I know it—I know it. [*He is still sitting staring forward, she rocks herself to and fro as if in pain.*] Oh, Aubrey! Oh! Oh!

*Aubrey.* Paula! [*Trying to comfort her.*]

*Paula.* Oh, and I wanted so much to sleep to-night!<sup>1</sup>

And the future? Of that, too, I perhaps may venture to say a word. The future of the drama depends more upon the temper of the people than upon anything else. For years past there has been a period of increasing prosperity, in which notions of ease and comfort and security have forced into the background all graver questions as inconvenient and irksome. How can the artist thrive when the standard of living is fixed by the men

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, Act iv.

who run theatres for various motives : because it is not a bad form of investment, because the patronage of the drama is fashionable, but mainly because they want to be amused ? It is under such circumstances that English comedy becomes farce, or else a so-called musical play ; while those who might appreciate tragedy if they saw it, have to content themselves with vulgar and extravagant melodrama. But when the people alter, these things will, too, be different, and it is possible that even before our eyes the temper of the nation is transforming itself. Tragedy born of the people is at its best and fullest when it is contemporaneous with a great outburst of national life. Are we not living at present under a wave of indignant emotion, which is sweeping away class distinctions, destroying the false notion that wealth is a form of nobility, bringing down the rough estimate of things to the bare human level, the qualities which make a virile and efficient man ? Never in history has a nation awakened to the consciousness of its real sources of greatness without finding expression for its heightened feeling in art. That I take it is the hope, as eventually it will be the glory, of the twentieth century.











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